

## WHAT THE MONKEYS CAN'T DO

1st in a Series on the Character of God Called, "Indescribable"  
Psalm 14:1-3 – Topic: Knowing God

Our son is exposed to real life on a daily basis. As an emergency medicine doctor he sees it all. He literally faces life and death situations on a fairly regular basis. He has a lot of stories at this point; some tragic, some hopeful, some inspiring, some appalling and some gruesome, to an extent to where the details are just too much to share. One theme that he experiences over and over has to do with the really dumb choices that people make and the often painful and sometimes really sad consequences that come from those choices. After telling us about one case that resulted in the patient losing part of a limb after making some really poor decisions, Toby related to us that there is a saying they often repeat in the Emergency Room. It is, "Play stupid games, win stupid prizes."

The truth is, that could be a motto for all of life. It seems to me that should serve as a warning for us. Apparently many of Toby's patients play games that for some reason don't seem stupid to them. It is only when they realize they are getting a really stupid prize for playing that game that they figure out they've made some very unfortunate choices. This serves as a warning to all of us because it means we might well be playing stupid games and not even know it. We won't know it until we get the stupid prizes we have won. Today I am going to start a series of sermons that are all about one thing that can be certain to keep us from playing stupid games. I'm calling the series "Indescribable." Let's begin by looking at Psalm 14:1-3. We will be thinking today about the most foundational, crucial question that every human being must answer. That question is, does God really exist?

"The fool says in his heart 'there is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile, there is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one." (Psalm 14:1-3)

### WE CAN KNOW THAT GOD EXISTS

Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" The claim there is that only a fool would believe there is no God. But there are many today who believe just that. In fact, increasingly that is the position of many of the elites of our society. If we are honest we all wonder about that. In the movie version of the classic Alexandre Dumas novel, *The Count Of Monte Cristo*, the protagonist is a man named Edmond Dantes. He is betrayed by friends, falsely convicted of a crime and sentenced to Chateau D'if, a hell hole of a prison. The warden is a sadistic man named Dorleac, who claims he

helps the prisoners mark time by giving them a beating every year on the anniversary of their arrival. But the first day he gives them an especially severe beating. As he is about to start torturing the newly-arrived Dantes, he says, “If you’re asking, ‘Why me, God?,’ you should know God has nothing to do with it. In fact, God is rarely seen in France this time of year.” Dantes says, “God has everything to do with it. He is everywhere. He sees everything.” Dorleac responds, “Very well, then. Let’s make a bargain, shall we? You ask God for help and the moment he shows up, I’ll stop.” Then he begins whipping Dantes.

Dorleac’s attitude raises what is really the ultimate question. Does God really exist? Is he really there? If he is, why doesn’t he show himself? Why doesn’t he show up when tragedy is devastating us? Why should we believe in him when we have no tangible evidence of him? It is reasonable to wonder when someone is being treated cruelly and unjustly why God lets it just happen if he is really there. We cannot see him or hear him. Life seems to roll along randomly with no discernible point and no evidence of justice or of the presence of God. So why should we believe God exists? I cannot prove beyond doubt that he exists, but I can give you strong evidence that God is very much real.

### **The pervasiveness of the idea of God argues for it.**

One of the curious facts of human history is that people in nearly every culture all over the world pray. Throughout history almost all groups of human beings have agreed that there is someone out there, someone far greater than human beings, who caused us to be here. Their ideas about who that is vary, but the persistence of this idea all over the world, throughout the human race is remarkable. Why is that idea there? Where did it come from?

In his monumental work, *The Existence And Attributes of God*, Stephen Charnock wrote about the prevalence of the idea of God, “how could those people, who were unknown to one another, separate by seas and mounts, differing in various customs and manner of living, had no mutual intelligence one with another, light upon this as a common sentiment...wherever you find human nature, you find this settled persuasion.”

In his book, *God Is Closer Than You Think*, John Ortberg tells a true story that illustrates the persistence of this “persuasion.” There was a woman named Sofia Cavaletti who did pioneering research in the study of spirituality in young children prior to her death in 2011. She told this story, which she said is fairly typical. She encountered a three-year-old girl whose parents were dedicated atheists. There was no mention of God, no church, and no Bible in that home, at all. Zero. This little girl asked her dad where the world came from. He answered in strictly naturalistic terms. But he wanted his daughter to be fully educated, so he said, “You should know that there are some people who say all this

comes from a very powerful being, and they call him God.” This was the first time she’d ever heard of that. At that, the little girl began dancing around the room with joy and said, “I knew what you told me wasn’t true. It’s him, it’s him!”

How does that happen? How does a little girl know that God is out there when no one has ever suggested such a thing? If that were an isolated incident it would be merely interesting. But it is not isolated. It is the norm. It is possible that human beings have an odd quirk in their nature that causes them to be curiously superstitious. We should also know that belief proves nothing. Most people once believed that the sun revolved around the earth. That did not make it true. It is possible that people are pervasively wrong about the God thing. But it is an unusual fact, and a little piece of evidence we should not ignore.

### **The existence of morality argues for it.**

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis made the point that human beings all have a sense that there is right and wrong. Our culture claims that everyone must decide for themselves what is right and wrong because there is no objective standard. But in fact that is not true.

People might say they don’t believe in objective morality, but that is not how they react when they experience mistreatment. Philosopher J. P. Moreland made this point in a graphic way once. He was having a discussion with a college student in his dorm room about this very issue. The student objected that Moreland was trying to force his morality and beliefs on him, and that he couldn’t do that because everything is relative. There is no objective right and wrong. So Moreland got up, took the student’s expensive stereo and started to leave. The student immediately objected, “Hey, what are you doing? You can’t do that.” He knew immediately that what Moreland was doing was wrong. Everyone, and I mean everyone, knows that some things are wrong. Torturing a child is wrong and we all know it.

Our little granddaughter Ella is now four. When she was two and three years old, her favorite show on TV was PJ Masks. This is a cute little show that features three kids who fight crime at night in their PJ’s. The show had several kids who perpetrated various evil schemes that the PJ Masks had to foil. What I find interesting is that Ella, at two and three years old, had no trouble differentiating between the good guys and bad guys and knowing that what the bad guys were trying to do was wrong. No one told her that. She just instinctively knew it.

Where does that come from? This moral sense can be found everywhere and with amazing consistency. Curiously, we don’t always abide by that moral sense, yet we still

acknowledge it. How is it here? If there is no one to answer to, such moral law makes no sense. Lewis makes a strong case that this persistent sense of the moral points to a law giver that is outside the human race, one we will have to answer to.

### **The evidence of creation argues for it.**

Some of the most powerful of evidence for the existence of God comes from the existence and order of creation. How did all of this come to be? Maybe it has always existed. Well, no. Science now tells us that everything had a beginning. How did it start?

It may be couched in different terms, but the answer of those who deny that God is the creator eventually boils down to random chances and the forces of nature combined in the distant past to cause an inconceivably massive explosion that resulted in the beginning of the universe. The problem is, before said supposed explosion, nothing existed. That means that random chance and the forces of nature did not exist. So how could things that didn't exist cause anything? Just reduce that theory down to its bare bones and you will immediately see the problem. *Nothing existed, but then "nothing" blew up and created everything.* That is just nonsense. Nothing can't do anything, including blow up.

The problems don't stop there. The order we see in creation screams that there is a creator. There are many factors that had to be exactly right within absurdly small tolerances in order for the universe and for life to exist. In an interview on NPR Cal Tech physicist, Sean Carroll, who is an atheist, admitted that everything had to be exactly right or there would be no universe. He said, "It's a delicate arrangement. It's a clue that the early universe is not chosen randomly. There is something that made it that way. We would like to know what." He admits that universe looks fine tuned. In fact, it is more orderly than it needed to be. Yet he refuses to accept that there was a designer.

It's called the Goldilocks Paradox. The [Newscientist.com](http://Newscientist.com) says, "many of the essential parameters of nature, the strengths of fundamental forces and masses of fundamental particles, seem fixed at values that are 'just right' for life to emerge. A whisker either way and we would not be here. It is as if the universe was made for us."

There had to be a precise balance of the strong and weak nuclear forces, the strength of gravity, the expansion rate of the universe, the exact number of electrons and protons, just to name a few, in order for life to exist. For instance, if the force of gravity were one trillionth of 1% greater or weaker than it is, then the universe would not exist. What are the odds it would be that exact by accident? So close to zero as to be negligible.

The number of electrons had to be equivalent to the number of protons to an accuracy level so minute that we have no name for it. It is 1 in 10 to the 37th power. How big is 10 to the 37th? Get some dimes. A lot of them. Cover the entire North American continent, not just the US, but the continent, with dimes. To what depth shall we cover the continent? One layer of dimes? You are way off. Ice cold. Much too small. A foot high layer of dimes? That's a joke. A mile high? Not even close. No, let's cover the continent with a pile of dimes from here to the moon, 239,000 miles away. Oh man, that is an inconceivably large pile of dimes. That's how big that number is? Well, no, not quite yet. Multiply those dimes by a billion to get 1 in  $10^{37}$ . ...Now here's where it gets *really* crazy. Before you started piling those dimes, I put a little red paint on one of them. Now you need to ask a friend to put on a *blindfold*, and out of those billion piles of dimes 239,000 miles high, pick just one of them. His chance of picking the one that I put the paint on is the same as the chance that the ratio of protons to electrons in all matter is just right and it happened randomly. It could happen. I suppose I'd have to admit that it could. But I just don't have enough faith to believe that could happen by accident.

Our DNA contains all the information that makes us who we are. One scientist did the math and concluded that all the DNA in your body spells out 150 trillion gigabytes of information. The question is does spelling out information happen by accident? There are people who claim that if you had an unlimited number of monkeys and you had them pound away at keyboards, given enough time they would eventually write a Shakespearean sonnet. The British National Council of Arts at one time put this to the test. They put six monkeys in a room with a computer. The monkeys banged away at it for a month. The amazing result was that after a month they had typed 50 pages of text, but not one single English word. This is astounding considering that the shortest words in English have only one letter. They are the words "a" and "I," but they only become words if they have a space on each side. Not once in a month did one monkey type " a " or " I ". The monkeys didn't even produce that, much less an English word, much less a sonnet, much less one someone already wrote, much less one Shakespeare wrote. Anthony Flew was a renowned atheist in England. However, in 2004 at the age of 80 he shocked everyone by announcing that he now believed in an intelligent creator. He said, "My discovery of the divine has been a pilgrimage of reason and not faith." He said about the monkey experiment that some people contend that the monkeys can do it every time, but the sheer improbability of it broke his atheism.

### **The evidence of Jesus Christ proves his existence**

The final and most convincing proof that God exists is found in Jesus Christ. He was a real man who lived in a real place at a real time in history. He did things that no human can do, demonstrating that he had power beyond human ability. He fulfilled prophecies

hundreds of years in the making. He claimed that the final proof of his identity as God in human form was that he would die, be buried, and then come back to life. He would defeat humanity's greatest enemy.

The evidence is overwhelming that he did do that. We can know that God is real, we can know who he is because he came here and revealed himself to us. We read the Bible because people in the first century saw it, and have passed on the news to us. God revealed himself by entering human history and letting people see him with their own eyes, hear him with their own ears and touch him with their own hands.

## WHAT WE THINK ABOUT GOD IS CRUCIAL

### Knowing Him Is the Most Important Priority

When I was in grad school part of the time I worked at a grocery store. I had the grunt job, the lowest of the low. They called the position "courtesy clerk," which to me felt like the most milquetoast, empty title ever. Was there a "rude clerk" position that was differentiated from a courtesy clerk? I tried to convince them that my title should be merchandise storage technician, but they wouldn't go for it. Our store was open 24 hours, but they didn't have storage technicians after midnight. I often had that late shift. That last shift included a number of particular duties. They always had a basket full of items shoppers had decided not to buy at the last minute, and you had to put all those back on the shelves. You had to bring all the carts in from the parking lot. You had to fill all the bag bins at the check stands so they'd be ready to go in the morning. The assistant manager who trained me informed me that I also had to clean the public restrooms. One night after I had been working for about two months, the store manager was there. That was unusual because he never had to be there that late. I had just finished cleaning the restrooms when I came back out. The store manager said, "Where have you been? I was looking for you but you had disappeared." I said, "I was cleaning the restrooms." He looked surprised and said, "Why were you doing that?" I told him the assistant manager had told me it was part of my closing duties. He said, "You've got to be kidding me. We have a store janitor we pay to come in every night and clean the store, including the restrooms. That's not your job." My next shift the assistant manager asked me near the end of the shift if I'd finished the restrooms. I told him that I hadn't and wasn't going to. He was about to get huffy with me, but I told him, "The store manager told me it's not my job and not to do it. If you don't like that you need to talk to him about it. By the way, don't you know there's a store janitor who cleans the restrooms?" I shouldn't have said that last bit. I think I was kind of rubbing it in, but that guy had caused me a lot of unnecessary, unpleasant work.

My point in that story is that it didn't matter what I thought my job was, it didn't matter what my fellow merchandise storage technicians thought, it didn't matter what the checkers thought, and it didn't matter what the assistant manager thought. The only opinion that mattered was the big boss, the store manager, the guy in charge. God is the creator, the guy in charge. His is the only opinion about our lives that matters. It doesn't matter what we think, or what other people think, it only matters what he thinks.

Knowing God is also the most important priority because Father knows best. I don't think I'm being foolish in thinking that when it comes to keeping our car in good condition my best bet is to consult what the company that built the car has to say about it. If you want to know how to get the most out of something you have bought, you listen to what the people say who made it. Who made us? God did. So if you want to know how to get the most out of your life, go to the one who made it. To do anything else is foolishness.

Years ago when Toby was still living at home we bought a portable basketball hoop. Like so many things these days when we got it we saw that it was marked with the three dirtiest words in the English language. I am going to repeat them, so if you are easily offended by foul language you might want to plug your ears. Those offensive words are "Some assembly required." We were at least wise enough to know that if you want to get the most out of the item you had bought, you needed to pay attention to the manufacturer's instructions. So we followed the directions step by step. But we got enthusiastic as we saw it coming together and at one point in our enthusiasm we missed a step. It told us before we did a final task we were to line up some holes on the pole. We missed that, completed the next step, and then realized that the backboard and hoop were not aligned with the base. It was crooked, and it was an irretrievable mistake. We just had to live with that crooked, cockeyed basketball hoop. Every time I looked at it I felt like it was mocking me.

The problem was we didn't pay careful enough attention to the builder's directions. If we want to make the most of the lives we have we need to pay careful attention to the instructions given to us by the one who made us. To do anything else is foolish and is guaranteed to lessen our experience in life.

### Knowing God Will Impact Who You Are

Psalm 14:1 says of the person who claims there is no God, "They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good." That verse claims that denying God has a direct

effect on our character. It claims that it corrupts us and it causes everything we do to be tainted with evil.

That is a very controversial claim, one that might be offensive to many people. It sounds like it is claiming that anyone who doesn't know God is a corrupt, horrible person. But we all know people who are not believers who seem to be wonderful people, maybe even better than us or even any Christian we know. So how can we say such a thing?

That does not mean that every person who is not a believer in God is automatically worse as a person than everyone who is a believer. A person who denies God actually can be a very fine person, comparatively speaking. There is a Hebrew context to this verse. The words in English make this person sound as awful as one could be. The person is corrupt and what they do is vile. However, in the Hebrew culture this words really meant they were unacceptable to God. The person and what he or she does is, in the Old Testament language, unclean, defiled.

Why would that be? There are a couple of reasons. There is a question that is at the heart of all of life. That question is, what is the center of everything? In the end once you clear all the dust away there are only two possible answers. Either the center of everything is God, or it is self. If you say there is no God, you eliminate one answer leaving only one alternative. The center of everything is self.

That mindset is the cause of all the evil that has ever existed in human history. We can actually do good things in life while having that mindset, but those good things will be tainted with evil, and we will inevitably do evil in some form if we put ourselves as the center. But if the center is not God, then it has to be self, and that inevitably makes us unclean. It also brings great harm to us and to others.

There is one more aspect to this business of denying God. In his book, *Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer wrote, "We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God." Somehow we tend to become like that which we worship. If you don't think there is a God, you don't think there is a lawgiver and judge, at the end of the day you will think there is no law. You will become a lawless person who believes that everything is permitted. The only limit on you will be what you can get away with and what you think will serve your purposes best. God is ultimate good, ultimate love, ultimate justice, ultimate kindness and grace. If we tend to move toward our image of God, what will happen to us? We will become truly good, loving, just, kind and full of grace.

Knowing God Will Affect How You See Life



If God is real and eternal, if he invites us into his kingdom, then life is eternal. That completely changes how we view this life. It gives us hope because the end of our time in this life is not the end of us. That one thing changes everything. It is going to vastly alter what matters in life and what is priority. *If God is real, he is out there, and he is, in fact, the center of all things, then the most important thing we could ever do is to live for his will and his glory. To do anything else is folly.*

If God is real then you will see life as not random and pointless, but as purposeful. You will know that you have meaning, and there is significance in everything you do. Without God the truth about life is that it is a bit like a jigsaw puzzle. We've done a couple of them during the lockdown. You spend time trying to figure how the pieces fit together, how to make a coherent picture out of a myriad of odd shapes. Eventually after a ton of work it all comes together and makes sense. Yay, you finished the puzzle and can see the picture. Then what happens? You break it all apart and put it back in the box. It didn't mean anything. Without God, that's life. It means nothing.

This is a big deal for us as we are all staying at home with our normal routines disrupted. We do much the same thing every day. We don't get to be with other people and it doesn't seem like much of anything we do matters. And yet, if God is there, then everything we do can matter, even in the mundane routines of life at home, day after day.

If God is there it changes how we see the difficulties and the stresses of life. It does two things for us as we are going through them. First, it means that these things are not pointless. Second, it means that we are not hopeless as we deal with them. God has promised to get us through them, and *he has promised that these afflictions are building for us an eternal weight of glory.*

## APPLICATION

### BE ASSURED OUR GOD IS THERE

One of my goals this morning is to remind you that there are powerful reasons for our faith in our God. It can be hard sometimes when we don't have proof of God's existence that is accessible to our physical senses. But it is crucial, especially when life gets tumultuous like it is now, to go back to the fundamentals and count on how solid the reasons for our faith actually are. As we have seen, faith in our God is the foundation of peace, confidence, purpose, joy and hope in life. So be confident in our God.

### KNOW GOD AS HE IS

We have seen today that we need to avoid the temptation to create an image of God as we want him to be or imagine him in our own minds. There are lots of incomplete and distorted views of who God is. Just like my friend's distorted view of me kept him from being a friend for a while, so our warped views of God distance us from God. As Tozer pointed out, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Writer Justin Taylor said, "No people has ever risen above its religion."

If we think of God as a frowning judge, quick to condemn, we will resent him, we will live in fear and we will be quick to find fault with others. If we think God is disengaged or untrustworthy we will be obsessed with controlling everything and everyone around us. If we think God is capricious we will be ever fearful and pessimistic, certain that he is going to trip us up or send us some foul fate. If we think that God either does not exist or is a sort of doddering grandfatherly type person, we will be morally compromised.

At the end of the day the only way for us to be good, loving, joyful, peaceful and secure people is for us to know God as he actually is. That's why we're going to spend the next few weeks seeing what the Bible teaches us about him.

#### SEEK GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART

The best thing we can do is make the main thing the main thing. The main thing in life is knowing, serving and glorifying God. The more we do that, the healthier we will be and the fuller our lives will be. *So let's pursue him and serve him with everything we are and have. Let him be the center of everything we are and do and our reason for being.*