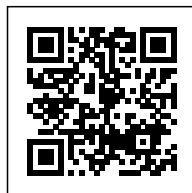


WHY I BELIEVE

Posted on March 1, 2020 by Alan Wilson



Many think of Jesus as just an idea or as an interesting person. The Apostle John tells us to look at the signs. What direction do they point? Believe. Believe in Jesus who is the object of our faith.

The God of the bible is not what many sometimes think he is. For many of us God is like the Loch Ness Monster. Some people claim to have caught glimpses of him. But when you compare their stories, it turns out that they all have slightly different ideas about what they think they've seen.

Devotees have trawled the Loch with submarines and sonar equipment. Miles of film have been shot and thousands of photographs have been taken in countless attempts to capture conclusive proof of the monster's existence.

But all we have to go on are a few grainy pictures that are just enough to keep our hopes alive. There is no proof that it exists. But then, there's no proof that it doesn't. So, people go on searching. And so, it is with God.

Most of us are open to the idea that there may well be someone out there, like God lurking in the darkest depths of the universe. We are curious about him in much the same way that an adopted child is curious about its biological parents.

We think that if we understood more about him, it might help us to understand more about ourselves. It might help us to fit some of the pieces together. But after years of searching we are like the philosophers; even if there is a God, we can't know him. Well not really.

Once in a while we may stumble across a footprint, or think we see a flash of a tail. We may have some kind of spiritual experience. But like the Loch Ness monster, God seems to be keeping himself to himself in the depths.

John through his gospel repeatedly claims there is a God who is really out there using the evidence he calls signs. John uses signs for our benefit, but that makes little difference. Because we are a sceptical lot. We don't put our trust in anyone, only the banks and financial markets.

We have come through the trials and tribulations of life. Family bust ups, divorce, relatives dying of

cancer, addictions, wars, rape, lies, environmental carnage, suicide, disease, famine and pestilence to name but a few. Why should we trust someone like God with all this happening? It's a fair question.

We have seen millions dying of poverty and drought and Islamic State chopping the heads of Christian's. We want to know why God doesn't seem to care or act. Why trust him? Maybe when we were younger, we used to be naive thinking that God was watching over us. But now that we have lived a bit we want to know where he was when his world needed him.?

If he cared you'd think he would come out of hiding. You'd think that he would do something to fix a few things and right a few wrongs. How can you trust someone when they don't seem to be around the neighbourhood? Putting it in a nutshell many believe that God exists, but he is beyond my reach; and of course, there are people who are quite happy to settle for God to remain outside their reach.

The first thing we can say is that God has a face. God is not a person that we devise in our minds. He is the God who really is out there. Some people have pen pals from childhood days. They correspond with them over the years and before Skype was on the go.

As you correspond with them you start to think; I wonder what they look like, what sort of a person are they based on, what they have said about themselves. It's really a guessing game. To know exactly what they are really like our only hope is for that person to come and make themselves known to us. John in his gospel is telling us that that is exactly what has happened. He sums this up in four words. Four words that show us that the God of the bible was not how I had imagined God to be.

Through Jesus Christ the God who is out there has come knocking on our door. John says; "the word became flesh." He calls Jesus the word, (logos) because words inform us of who he is. And Jesus speaks to us about who he is and why he has come. Now some of us may think that Jesus is just another in the long list of religious leaders down through the years. But this is what John says about Jesus the Word. "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God."

What John is telling us is that the story of Jesus did not begin in Bethlehem as some imagine. In the beginning when the world was first created, Jesus was there with God. So, what sort of person would be with God from the beginning of time, space and history. They would have to be God. That's what John says; "the word was God. Through him all things were made, without him nothing was made that

has been made." The word, Jesus; was not just with God from the beginning watching over everything, it was through him that God made the universe. Jesus created all life species.

From the ant to the elephant, from the shark to the eagle, from the daffodil to the mighty oak. He made life happen. Including forming and shaping us in his image, from the dust of the ground; to where we will all return.

At a point in history there came a moment in time during the reign of Caesar Augustus, when the one who made the stars; became a tiny cell in the womb of an unmarried Jewish girl. This majestic God became flesh and bone. He has a face we can look into.

Jesus is not just one of God's prophets or spokesmen, Jesus is God who left the splendour and majesty of heaven to come and live on earth for a period of time. Do we believe this so far?

The fact that Jesus is God; he came to us shows us three things about what God is really like. God has a face where the word became flesh. Secondly, he is committed to his creation. When God created the world, he looked at all of it and he said that it was "very good." There were no imperfections or mistakes. Everything in nature worked together in unison; unlike today.

In the Garden of Eden and across nature there were no pestilences or famines or plagues or disease. It was like the Louis Armstrong song *What a Wonderful World*. "I see trees of green red roses too. I see them bloom for me and you and I think to myself what a wonderful world." That's what it was like.

But as we know sin entered into the world and changed everything. The wonderful world is still wonderful, but it has serious flaws and fault lines that run through it everywhere from top to bottom and from side to side.

The sin we inherited which can be traced back to Adam and Eve is prevalent in each and every human being. To sin is to be human. To be human is to be fallen.

Even though we see the problems we have created all around us and the way and manner in which we have walked out on God; he has not walked out on us. Environmental damage; habitat loss; and the decline in species has been caused by man not by God. God has placed everything on this planet we need although we have to work for it.

The story of the world begins with the creator. John tells us that there is a new beginning for the world and it begins with the creator. God is committed to his creation despite what we see and hear on the news; and bit by bit he will re-create.

The world of science wants to harness God by its formulations and theories, it wants to make God look like a fool and assert its place ahead of God. The machinations of man building the Tower of Babel is a classic example as is the modern-day EU European Union. But God is not an abstract force we can harness like the power of the wind or sea rather he is a person, a face, whom we can love. In other words, relationship is at the very heart of who he is. The Word made his dwelling among us.

When did God previously make his dwelling with his people to show them that he was committed to them? Remember the tabernacle was the tent; the tent of meeting that God told Moses to make when the Israelites were fleeing from Egypt through the desert. It was to be pitched in the centre of the camp as a symbolic reminder that their God was in their midst.

Then there was the pillar of cloud and fire which served as the visible evidence of God's presence by which he guided them from Egypt to Sinai and then during their years in the wilderness.

By day, God went ahead of the people to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. Not only that Manna and Quail were provided daily by God for over a million people in the middle of a desert. God was there with his people every step of the way. God has come among us, through his Holy Spirit.

So, when we think of God somehow out there in the darkness and depths like the Loch Ness Monster or in the far reaches of the universe we have got it wrong. God comes to us to search for us and rescue us. The good shepherd who comes looking for his sheep.

In the bible there is no record of the lost shepherd being tracked down by the conscientious sheep. It's always the other way around. We are the ones who have messed up and God is the one who comes looking for us. And when he comes, he comes to us not as a force that we are to harness, but with a face we are to love because of his commitment to us. This is good news for the world. Jesus came into the world as the light of the world to shine in the darkness.

The world is a dark foreboding place. The days are evil. God knows this. He has come to make sense of our lives and give us purpose and direction.

If there is anyone who can give us the right answers it has got to be God.

The world is in a mess; Europe is in a mess. God has the answers but we prefer to do things our way.

When God comes with the answers, he doesn't just give us some carefully worded ones he becomes one of us. It would have been very easy for God to give us a written description of him and what he does and doesn't do. But that would have been a cop out. God had a far better way. He came as the word made flesh and lived among people. This is what God is like. His love took him to us.

Part of our history going back to the middle ages portrays Jesus as a ghostly pale almost spectre like figure with a dinner plate stuck to the back of his head. It is often a great painting by one of the masters but it is poor theology, because it makes Jesus seem less than human. John talks about a God who became flesh. Flesh gets hungry and tired. It aches, it cries, it gets hurt. God became one of us in every way yet was without sin. Are you misunderstood by the people close to you? Jesus has been there.

Are you grieving? He has cried by the grave of a friend. Have friends let you down? He knows what it's like to feel betrayed. Are you close to giving up? He knows exactly what you are going through.

God has a face and a mind and a body who understands us and someone we can relate to. John says; 'the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the father full of grace and truth.'

We sometimes say to someone; "Go on then show us what you're made of." We are really asking that person to show us their glory; their true self. God's glory is what God is like in all his brilliance. In Old Testament times no one could look on God's glory and live. It would have been like standing too close to the sun. No one was allowed to see God face to face; it was forbidden. But all this changed, for Jesus Christ has made it possible for us to see his glory.

With Jesus we don't just catch a fleeting glimpse of God, we can look into his face and see God in all his brilliance. Only it's not the sort of brilliance we have in mind; no star dust. Jesus speaks about his hour of glory. He tells his disciples that there will come a crowning moment when his brilliance will be displayed for all to see.

When we think of someone's hour of glory, we think of holding the World Cup aloft, or standing on the rostrum receiving a gold medal, or receiving an Oscar award or presented with a Nobel prize. That's their 15 minutes of glory.

Jesus says that his hour of glory is the hour of his Death. It turns out that restoring each person to God took the death of Jesus on a cross. It is there that we see God in all his brilliance and glory. On a cross of shame.

This turns everything we have thought about God upside down. How can the crucifixion reveal the glory of God? It certainly reveals the brutality of the world. Only when you look to the cross of Jesus and see him crucified upon it and more to the point; why he was nailed to the cross will you ever see and understand your sin and his glory.

What is it about the cross of Christ which angers the world and stirs it to close its ears and persecute those who preach and live it out? It's this; Christ died on the cross for you and me; sinners. Becoming a curse for us. The cross tells us then some very unsavoury truths about ourselves, namely we are sinners under the righteous curse of God's law and we cannot save ourselves.

The Lamb of God bore our sin and curse precisely because we could gain release from them in no other way. If we could have been forgiven by our own good works, by being circumcised and keeping the law, we may be quite sure that there would have been no cross.

Every time we look at the cross Christ seems to say to us, 'I am here because of you. It is your sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your debt I am paying, your death I am dying. Nothing in all of history or in all of the world cuts us down to size like the cross. And we loathe the very thought of it. All of us have inflated views of ourselves especially in self-righteousness, until we have visited a place called Calvary.

It is there at the foot of the cross that we shrink to our true size. Let's never forget. The word became flesh..... for us.

Rev Alan Wilson is a recently retired Presbyterian Minister in Northern Ireland. He was a former Police Officer during the 'troubles' before going into the ministry. He is married to Ann and they are now proud

grandparents of Jacob and Cora. He enjoys keeping Alpaccas, gardening, watching football and learning how theology relates to the environment and the world at large. He and his wife spent a summer Exchange in 2018 with a Presbyterian Church in Toronto.

The [image](#) shows, "The Lamentation" by Giotto, painted between 1304 to 1306.

