

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, January 13, 2008
Rev. John Tapscott

“QUESTIONS FOR THE ATHEIST” - Part 1

Isaiah 42: 5-8

An article in The Toronto Star December 29, 2007 was entitled, “Unbelievers - A Year of Celebrity Atheists Taking Potshots at God.” There were photos of Christopher Hitchens and his best-selling book “god (small g) is not Great”, along with Richard Dawkins and his best-seller “The God Delusion.” Both authors are atheists meaning that they are against God and deny his existence. Last summer I read part of “The God Delusion”, because someone I know was quite impressed by the book. I agreed to read Dawkins’ book if he agreed to read Lee Strobel’s “The Case for Faith.” So he did and I’d love to report that he was converted from his atheism. That didn’t happen. But perhaps some seeds were planted.

Now the very day I read this article, I also read a majestic passage from Isaiah chapter 42. In verse 8, God says to Israel, “I am the Lord, that is my name, my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to graven images.” God must chuckle over these little ants of men who deny his existence. After all, he is the One who created them and even gives them freedom to deny that he exists. The Lord God is not a tyrant who destroys unbelievers on the spot. God loves them. He desires their worship and is actually working for their repentance! Now those who continue to deny God’s existence and resist him are in for a surprise, either at the end of their earthly lives or before, if Christ the judge should return quickly. Now we don’t know when Christ will return, but the wise person is ready to meet the Lord however and whenever he comes by putting their trust in Him now.

But until the last day people like Hawkins and Hitchens do undermine people’s faith and confidence in God. I know a teenager who has heard all this anti-God talk and now describes himself on his Face Book page as a “born-again atheist.” What troubles me about these authors is not only their popularity but the fact that they get a free ride by the media. They freely challenge people’s belief in God, but very few in the media challenge their unbelief. Even the Star’s article, though it raises some issues, treats them quite gently. As Christ-followers we need to be aware of what is going on and try to counteract it. So today and for the next two weeks, I want to ask the atheist some questions suggested by verses from Isaiah 42. I don’t expect them to respond but I hope you will see that the atheist position is really quite absurd. Belief in God is a far more reasonable and solid position. Isaiah 42:9 reads, “Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those

who walk in it.” So my question for the atheist today is this: “You say there is no God, so where do we come from? In other words, how do you explain the creation, the universe, you and me? If there is no God, we did all this come from? Where do we come from?”

Now the atheist tells us that the creation and we ourselves happened somehow, but whatever that somehow is, didn't involve a Creator. There is no mind behind creation and no goal to it all. We just are. The incredible complexity of life evolved from one living cell; actually from before that when non-living chemicals somehow combined to produce life. Those who use Darwin's theory to account for everything say that we are the product of natural selection operating on random variations over billions of years.

Now agnostics say, “Well, there may or may not be a Creator,” and leave the question open to further investigation. Atheists go much further. They are adamant that there is no God, no intelligent designer behind creation. But Lee Strobel in his book “The Case For a Creator,” says that rejecting God as Creator leads you to the following conclusions - “Nothing produces everything”; “Non-life produces life”; “Randomness produces fine-tuning”; “Chaos produces information;” “Unconsciousness produces consciousness”; “Non-reason produces reason.” And quite frankly, all this is untenable, spiritually, scientifically and intellectually.

An atheist stood on a soap-box in London's Hyde Park loudly proclaiming that there is no God. A man in the crowd tossed a soft tomato toward the speaker. It hit his chest and splattered all over his coat. The atheist demanded, “Where did that come from?” The boy said, “It came from no where and from no one, just as you say this universe and all of us come from - from no one and from no where.”

Friends, don't let the atheists fool you with their slick arguments. When you ask them, “Where do we come from”, their answer at the end of the day really can be boiled down to “We come from no where and no one, and we are going no where and to no one.”

Now if you find that answer unsatisfying, don't be surprised. We are not meant to find it satisfying. The Bible's answer to the question “Where do we come from?” is that we come from God. The whole universe, says the Bible, and each one of us comes from God, created by his power and purpose and design. God is our Creator, our Father. Isaiah says, “God the Lord...who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it.” Now we who believe in a Creator don't reject all of Darwin's theory or the Big Bang. We say these things were and are part of God's creative process. Creation started somewhere, and God could have started it all with the big bang. And it seems that God uses evolution as part of the creative process. There is strong evidence for some forms of evolution in nature. But hanging all of creation

on the Big Bang and evolution without a Creator is too much weight for these theories to bear. Scientific exploration points not away from God but towards God. The evidence for a divine Creator or a First Cause is written throughout creation. That's why when you want to find an atheist at a university, you must go to the philosophy department, not the science department, because there's too many believers in the science departments.

Just to give an example - the tolerances that allow for the universe and life to exist, tolerances in temperature, distance, time, and so on, are so incredibly minute, it seems that they must have been planned and calibrated by a great and powerful mind. It's much harder to believe they all came together randomly.

The Star article quotes the atheist Dawkins as saying, "There may be fairies at the bottom of the garden. There isn't any evidence for it, but you can't prove that there aren't any, so shouldn't we be agnostic with regard to fairies?" But that argument is simplistic and misleading. For one thing, you must say to the agnostics - of course you can't finally prove the existence of God, because that would leave no room for faith. And to the atheists, you have to say, of course there is no evidence for fairies at the bottom of the garden, but with God it's quite a different matter. The apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 1. "Ever since the creation of the world God's invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." Those words could be directed to our atheist authors. "You are without excuse," since the evidence God has put for his existence in creation is so overwhelming. The leap of faith required to believe in a Creator is small indeed.

But the atheist authors are not only fighting the external evidence for God's existence; they are fighting something within themselves, too. You see, God has put deep within us a witness to the fact that we have been planned and created by someone greater than ourselves. It's said that there are no atheists in a fox hole, or on a death-bed. Another place is in a hospital delivery room. I've heard this from parents again and again. "When my child was born, I felt great wonder when I saw that new life, so perfectly formed. I somehow knew that my child had been made by God." The instinct that we come from God is planted in us by God. And the atheists are so vehement in their unbelief because they are trying to suppress that God-given instinct. The evidence, both internally and externally is that this universe, and we ourselves come from God. All the evidence underlines Isaiah's words, "God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it..."

Let me close today by going a bit further and expanding on the Christian view of God the Creator. The Bible not only says that God is our Creator but that he created us for a specific purpose - to be his loving children forever. Hebrews tells us, "God created the world through

His Son...Christ reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sin, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” The whole creation and each one of us was created in the image of Jesus Christ. Now the image of Christ in creation and in us has been marred by sin. We are fallen creatures. We are not what God created us to be. Sin separates us from God, fills us with fear, and puts us on the road to eternal death. But in love God sent His Son on a rescue mission. By his incarnate life, atoning death and resurrection victory, Christ acted to make us God’s children not just by creation, but also by redemption. So it is for all of us who receive Christ and believe in His Name. God is working by His Holy Spirit to make us obedient children who do God’s will and glorify him. God’s unstoppable goal is to recreate us and all creation in image of His Son. God’s goal for his creation is nothing less than the Kingdom of God, where his will is done and his Name is glorified forever.

John’s Gospel says Jesus knew that he had come from God and was going to God. Friends, through our faith in Jesus Christ, we know that we have come from God and that we are going to God. We know that we are God’s children not just for a season, but for eternity, held by the divine love that will never let us go. And that gives our lives meaning, purpose, direction, just as it did for Jesus. So we can believe with the atheists that we came from nothing and are going to no one - or we can believe as Jesus believed - that we have come from God and that we are going to God. I know the one I choose. And I’m betting you’ve made the same choice.