

God: The Evidence (SERIES)

Series (Parts 1 to 3). Holy Trinity Twickenham, January 2008.

Part 1: Origins (Psalm 8, John 20:24-29).

Back in 2004 something interesting happened. It didn't hit the headlines, but its implications were massive. The world's leading atheist announced that he'd stopped being an atheist and started believing in God. His name was Antony Flew, and since 1950 he'd been one of Britain's leading philosophers. And the world's leading advocate of atheism. He'd written lots of books and academic papers denying there's a God.

But then in 2004, Antony Flew announced that he'd changed his mind. What he said was this. That as a young philosopher he'd committed himself to the principle of the Greek philosopher Socrates: Follow the evidence wherever it leads. And he said the evidence now clearly points towards the existence of God. And he said something very interesting: the insights of modern science in particular point towards the existence of God.

Now, that'll surprise some people. There have been lots of books written recently by outspoken atheists. Like *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins. And what these books say is: 'Look - everybody knows there's no evidence for the existence of God. And the world will be a better place if everybody stops believing in God.'

So why did the leading atheist of them all, Antony Flew, break ranks and say that the evidence, especially the scientific evidence, now points towards God?

Well, today we're starting an important three-part series called God: the Evidence. And what we're doing is very simple. We're looking at some of the most compelling bits of evidence that point towards the existence of God. In other words, we're trying to show that believing in God isn't a silly, irrational thing that people do in the teeth of the evidence. There are reasons for belief, as well as emotional and spiritual needs in ourselves. It's a series for people like me who find it hard to believe without some sort of evidence.

Today we're looking at the evidence from origins - first the origins of the universe, and then the origins of life on earth.

1) First, the origins of the universe. If you go back 100 years, to the start of the 20th century, scientists were confident that they understood the nature of the universe. That it had no beginning or end. That it was infinite in time and space. It just *is*.

A few scientists wondered aloud if the universe might have begun at a particular moment. But their colleagues said this was a silly idea, how could the universe suddenly start from nothing? Then in 1929 the astronomer Edwin Hubble did some experiments where he found something astonishing. Our neighbouring galaxies are actually moving away from our galaxy. In other words, everything in the universe is flying apart.

This started a flurry of research by astronomers and physicists. And they found it's true. Everything in the universe really is flying apart. And the result is that most scientists now believe the universe began at a single moment, the Big Bang, 14 billion years ago. The universe began as an infinitely dense point of pure energy, which exploded, and the way it exploded created stars and planets. The universe had a beginning.

And that has an important implication: something caused it. There was a time before the universe existed, and there was a moment of creation, effectively out of nothing. Now that ought to sound familiar to anybody who's read the opening words of the Bible. An astrophysicist called Robert Jastrow wrote this:

'For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.'

But that's not all. We know the universe had to expand at exactly the right rate for stars and planets to form. Stephen Hawking says that if the rate of expansion one second after the Big Bang had been slower by one part in 100 thousand million million, the universe would have collapsed back in on itself again. On the other hand, if the rate of expansion had been faster by just one part in a million, stars and planets couldn't have formed either. One leading scientist says this: 'The existence of a universe as we know it rests upon a knife edge of improbability.'

In fact, there are 15 factors of physics that all have to be exactly right for the stars and planets to come into existence. And any of these could have been different. Things like the speed of light and the force of gravity. It's like a combination lock where all the dials have million of numbers on and they all have to be turned to the right number to unlock the thing. In other words, the very existence of our universe following the Big Bang is staggeringly unlikely.

Just one more example. The relationship between the forces of electromagnetism and gravity has to be exactly right. Shift it in one direction by a fraction of one in a trillion-trillion-trillion and only small stars can exist, shift it in the opposite direction and only large stars can exist. But for reasons too complicated to go into now, you have to have both large and small stars in the universe to produce planets.

One astrophysicist, Hugh Ross, puts it like this. Cover the whole of America with coins. Each coin is in a column of coins reaching as high as the moon. Then do the same for a billion other continents of the same size. Then paint one coin red and put it somewhere in one of the piles. Then blindfold a friend and ask her to pick out the red coin. That's how hard it is to achieve the right balance of these forces of electromagnetism and gravity, for planets and life to be possible. It's such a minutely fine balance. And that's only one of the things that has to be just right!

Stephen Hawking, the astronomer Fred Hoyle, and lots of other top scientists tell us that the overwhelming appearance of the universe is of something that's been designed, something intentional. The odds against it all happening by accident are just too massive.

Remember, this isn't theologians saying this: it's scientists. The universe started at a moment in time. There was a time before it existed. Something happened to create the universe, and lots of separate factors all had to be minutely calibrated for that huge explosion then to produce stars and planets and life. The whole thing begins to look like much more than an accident!

2) The other evidence from origins is to do with the origins of *life* on earth, once the planet had cooled down. So 14 billion years ago, there's the Big Bang. Four billion years ago, the earth is still just rock. No life of any sort. Just 150 million years later, the earth is teeming with single-cell microbes. The earliest forms of life. Where did they come from?

Some biologists say: 'Well, life arose by chance. In those pools of chemical soup, maybe due to the effect of ultraviolet light, or lightning.' They say: give it long enough, millions of years, and you're bound to hit on the right circumstances for life to emerge.

These biologists often give the example of monkeys typing. They say that if you sit lots of monkeys at typewriters, typing randomly, then eventually they'd type out one of Shakespeare's plays, by chance. In the same way, people say, life could just have happened by chance, given millions of years of things randomly colliding.

Now, unfortunately for these biologists, mathematicians actually did the monkey typewriter experiment. Not with real monkeys, but with computerised monkey simulators. And they discovered that even to get the monkeys to type a few words of a Shakespeare play, in the right order, you'd need 100 monkeys typing for longer than the entire history of the universe. In other words, it's a mathematical impossibility.

And the same is true with the origins of life. The building block of life is tiny chains of amino acids, and there are 20 kinds of amino acids in living creatures. But they've got to be arranged in exactly the right order. For example, a blood cell molecule is made up 4 chains of amino acids, with 146 amino acids in each chain.

But the number of possible ways these 20 kinds of amino acids can be arranged in those chains is huge. In fact, it's 20 to the power of 146. Which is a big number. More than the number of atoms in the entire universe! But for life to exist, they all have to be in exactly the right place.

That's a mathematical way of saying: the chances of life accidentally emerging from non-life are unimaginably tiny. Everything has to be exactly right. It's just not going to happen by accident. The physicist Freeman Dyson says this: 'The more I examine the universe and the details of its architecture, the more evidence I find that the universe in some sense must have known we were coming.' Everything has to be exactly right.

It's what physicists call the *Goldilocks Factor*. You remember the story of Goldilocks, where one porridge was too hot and one was too cold and one was just right. The same is true of life on earth. Dozens of complicated variables all have to be exactly right for life to be possible. If the earth were a fraction closer the sun or a fraction further away, life couldn't exist, because it would be either too cold or too hot. If the earth was larger or smaller than it is, it couldn't have an atmosphere, so life couldn't exist either. The earth needed exactly the right amount of volcanic activity, to produce the right amount of CO₂ to trap the heat of the sun and keep us from a permanent ice age.

So many apparent coincidences. But all working to the same end: making possible the arrival of life on earth. After a while, it all begins to look suspiciously as if it were intended and designed that way. Through history, people have had a gut instinct that the wonders of the earth show evidence of an Intelligent Mind behind it all - a Designer. People look at the stars or a sunset, and they're filled with wonder and even worship. We live in an age when science is confirming that instinct in dramatic and extraordinary ways.

One of the world's leading scientists is Francis Collins, the head of the Human Genome project which mapped DNA, the code of life. He's also a practising Christian. He's written a fantastic book on faith and science (*The Language of God*, Pocket Books 2007), and at the end he writes this: 'It is time to call a truce in the escalating war between science and spirit. The war was never really necessary, Science is not threatened by God; it is enhanced. God is most certainly not threatened by science; he made it all possible. So let us together seek to reclaim the solid ground of an intellectually and spiritually satisfying synthesis of all great truths'.

And for the open-minded seeker after truth, the message is this: to those who keep their eyes open, God has left signposts to himself scattered throughout the universe. Many, many of the world's greatest scientists and thinkers in recent years have been so amazed at finding these signposts, that they've gone on to find the One the signposts point to.

In other words, faith and reason aren't opposites. Faith and science aren't opposites. As that great atheist philosopher Antony Flew discovered, if you're open-minded and follow where the evidence leads, it leads to God.

Part 2: Morality (Romans 7:14-25, Mark 2:13-17)

One of the world's greatest scientists is Francis Collins. He's the director of the Human Genome Project, one of the most important scientific projects in history. It involved mapping the entire DNA of the human body, the code of life. Francis Collins used to be an atheist. But he was converted to Christianity, and there were two main pieces of evidence that made him question his atheism and pushed him towards faith in God.

One was the evidence of modern science that we looked at last week: the evidence that the universe actually had a beginning. Evidence from astrophysics that against massive odds, every single one of the conditions for the development of stars and planets was just right. Evidence for the origins of life on earth 10 billion years later: again, massively against the odds.

In fact, the odds against the universe coming into existence, and life on earth emerging, are so tiny that they're almost a statistical impossibility. Senior physicists and biologists (even atheists like Richard Dawkins) agree that the earth, and life on earth, overwhelmingly have the characteristics of something intentional, something designed. And if you missed that talk, it's going to be on our website soon.

But the other bit of evidence that persuaded Francis Collins to abandon his atheism he found in a book by CS Lewis, the author of the Narnia books. CS Lewis didn't only write children's stories. Most of his writing was about Christianity. He'd been converted from atheism to Christianity himself, as a young Oxford lecturer.

Francis Collins was reading a book by CS Lewis called *Mere Christianity*, which was based on radio talks CS Lewis gave during the Second World War. The thing that grabbed Collins's attention was the title of the first part of the book: 'Right and wrong as a clue to the meaning of the universe'.

What CS Lewis says is this. Imagine children at a birthday party. You give one child a much smaller amount of ice-cream than the others. You know the child who's been given the small amount will shout out: 'That's not fair!' In fact, we all know that one thing children are always sensitive to is fairness. You always hear them grumbling 'It's not fair!'

We hear that so often, we just take it for granted. It's what kids do. But if you think about it, something interesting is going on. Every child knows there's a reason why being fair is important. In other words, they're appealing to a higher standard, a Moral Law that's binding on everybody and that everybody basically acknowledges. There are moral reasons why we ought to do something, even if it's not in our own interest.

A man walks over the bridge at Teddington Lock and sees that a small child has fallen in and is drowning. He instantly knows he ought to jump in and save the child. Even though he knows that (at the very least) he'll get cold and wet, and (at worst) he'll put himself at risk. There's an inner voice of conscience that says he ought to help. In other words, categories of right and wrong appear to be hard-wired into human nature. Even if they conflict with our own self-interest and our own survival instincts.

It begins to look as if there's a higher authority than ourselves, beyond ourselves, which calls us to account. Our conscience, our sense of right and wrong, our instinct to self-sacrifice for others. Of course, if there is a God, that would make perfect sense.

Now, some sceptics are not convinced. Some people don't like the idea that there's a divine moral law binding on everybody, everywhere. There are 3 main objections:

1) Some people are cultural relativists. In other words, they say morality is *relative* from one culture to another. What's right for us, might not be right for people in China or a remote Pacific island. Or in ancient Rome. All that matters is that a particular culture agrees amongst itself as to what its values are going to be. So if these cultural relativists are right, you'd expect there to be lots of different moralities around the world. Their morality applies to people in that culture, but not outside it.

Unfortunately for the cultural relativists, that's not what the evidence shows. Historians and anthropologists have found that the core morality hard-wired into people everywhere is the same. *Do not murder, love your neighbour, respect your parents, don't commit adultery, be honest, seek justice, don't lie, help other people, and so on.* Sure, there are differences in customs, usually to do with dress and sexuality. And people often break the rules. But the amazing thing, which we just take for granted and don't even think about, is that everybody else has basically the same framework of morality to us.

The other thing is this. If cultural relativism is true, nobody has a right to criticise any other culture. Take an extreme example: Nazi Germany or Cambodia under Pol Pot. We'd want to say: those regimes did things that were evil. At the Nuremberg trials after the War, some of the Nazi high command tried to defend themselves by saying precisely that morality is relative from one culture to another, so nobody else had a right to criticise them.

Of course, the answer from the international community was: you're wrong. There is a framework of morality that's binding on everybody. In fact, the moment you talk of human rights, you're acknowledging there is a universal framework of morality. Occasionally we read about so-called honour killings, where - say - an Asian bride is killed for dishonouring the family in some way. We don't say: 'Well that's fine - that's just what they do in that culture'. We instinctively appeal to a higher moral standard that says murder is wrong.

2) But some people go further than cultural relativists. They say: OK, so cultural relativism has flaws. Maybe you can't say a morality just works within a particular society and not for other people. So maybe I can only ever know a morality that works for me. You could call these people *individual relativists*. Maybe morality is relative to me as an *individual*.

The problem with this is that it's impossible to live out in practice. If a man burgles my home, I believe what he did was wrong, and I want him punished. When Amelie was killed in Twickenham, that was wrong, and the killer deserves to be punished. The individual relativist has no basis for saying why anything anybody else does is wrong. As long as they're each being true to themselves, anything goes!

Of course, there are some people whose only moral value is what they feel is right for them. But we don't call them individual relativists. We call them criminally insane or a similar, more PC phrase. Why? Because we expect everybody to accept the same set of basic moral obligations. People who act as if their values are just a matter of personal preference are a serious risk to other people and society. We live as if there really are moral obligations on us. As if moral standards are *recognized* rather than *invented*.

3) There are lots of people today who agree that morality does seem to be universal and hard-wired into the human psyche. So they say: 'Aha, that's *evolution* for you. We've evolved morality as a way to benefit the species, in the battle for survival'. And they talk about the value of altruism - putting others first. If everybody does that, the species as a whole will survive better.

Now, the problem with this argument is that it often isn't true. Evolutionary biologists have done studies with nonhuman primates - monkeys. And they find the evidence points in the opposite direction. A dominant male monkey finds a new mate. And he'll often commit infanticide: he'll kill any earlier children of this female. Why? Because he wants to clear the way for his own offspring. What evolutionary biology primes him to do is to ensure the survival of his own genes. He's not bothered about anybody else!

The other snag with a purely evolutionary explanation for morality is this. And it goes back to the man walking over the bridge at Teddington Lock. The man feels morally obliged to jump in and save that child, even at the risk of his own life. Even if it means the end of his own survival, and the the end of the survival of his genes for future generations. A Mother Teresa-type person is acting against the survival of the fittest. She's helping the weakest and most vulnerable in society, who in evolutionary terms ought to die off and leave the way for the stronger specimens. But we still admire her morally.

A purely evolutionary explanation for morality doesn't work. So often our moral impulse cut against the basic principles of evolutionary survival.

So where does all this get us? The implications are massive, as CS Lewis and Francis Collins found. Last week we found that the cutting edge of modern science points towards there being an Intelligent Mind who created the universe, and ensured the right circumstances for the development of stars and planets and, eventually, life on earth. What that points to is there being an all-powerful God. But it still doesn't tell us much about that God, his character or purposes.

This week we found that within each one of us there's something we take for granted, but which has big implications. We have a sense of right and wrong. We have a conscience that tells us that irrespective of our own preferences and self-interest, some things are morally right. Every time a child says 'That's not fair', they're appealing to a higher moral authority than themselves. And they're taking it for granted that everybody else will recognize the same moral standard they're appealing to.

And we found that attempts to explain away our sense of right and wrong, or reduce it simply to evolutionary instinct, don't work.

What that points to is there being an all-powerful God, who's good. Who gives us our categories of good and evil. These qualities aren't arbitrary, because they're rooted in the character of God himself.

Now if that's true, what should we expect to see in ourselves and in the world? We should expect to see people have a strong sense of what's morally right. But because we're not perfect, we're fallen human beings, we keep falling short and making mistakes and doing things that are wrong. But we we don't stop knowing there's a moral ideal we should be aiming at. So I might tell a lie. But that doesn't stop me believing there's such a thing as truth and untruth.

That's precisely what we do find. And it's precisely the scenario St Paul portrays in the Bible. People know what's right, but so often do what's wrong. And that's where biblical words like sin and forgiveness come in. The biblical understanding of human nature fits the evidence, in an absolutely extraordinary way.

So the second evidence for the existence of God is our inescapable sense of right and wrong. Next week, we'll look at the third and final piece of evidence. And in some ways, it's the most devastating and far reaching of all.

Part 3: the Empty Tomb (Hebrews 1:1-4, Mark 16:1-8)

We've reached the last part in our series *God: The Evidence*. We've been looking at clues that point towards the existence of God, and I promised we'd end up with the most intriguing evidence of all: evidence that Jesus rose from the dead. Some people will say: 'Come on, that's not real evidence! That's just based on a biased story in the Bible!'

In fact, people have two big arguments *against* Jesus rising from the dead:

- 1) We know dead bodies don't come back to life.** So whatever the Bible says, it can't possibly have happened. End of story.
- 2) There are alternative explanations.** Like: Jesus never died at all; he fainted on the cross, then the cold tomb revived him and he went on to marry Mary Magdalene. Or: Jesus *did* die but the disciples *claimed* he'd come back to life again. Or they had *visions* of Jesus that *felt* as if he was alive. Or the memory of Jesus was *spiritually* alive in them, and that's what they meant by 'resurrection'.

Well, we can think about those objections in a minute. First, we need to be clear what the Bible says happened to Jesus, what his followers saw, and what the early Christians experienced.

When Jesus was taken down from the cross, on a Friday, he was put in a cave sealed with a huge boulder. And a Roman guard was stationed outside. Incidentally, the boulder would have weighed about the same as a Renault Mégane. So you'd need several people to move it, and they'd have to use big levers. Three days later, early on Sunday morning, a group of people find the boulder rolled away and the tomb's empty.

Soon after, Jesus's followers start saying they've met Jesus. Not a ghost or a hallucination, but the real Jesus, with a new *physical* body. So physical that his disciple Thomas could touch the wounds on his hands and Jesus could eat barbecued fish at the lakeside. And hundreds of other people claim they've met with Jesus as well.

After 40 days, Jesus leaves his disciples. He's still embodied, still physical. But he's not physically present with his followers any more. He goes to be with God, and the name for this is the Ascension. So what about those big objections to all this?

1) We know dead bodies don't come back to life. But the thing is: Jesus's disciples would agree.

The gospel-writers would agree. Dead bodies don't come to life again.

That's why the events of the first Easter are so astounding and controversial. Something happened. Something so huge and unexpected that it shook the ancient world to its core. At the time of Jesus there were plenty of rabbis, religious teachers, rebel leaders and would-be messiahs. Yet within a few generations, they were all forgotten except one. Within a few generations, the greater part of the Roman Empire had come to believe that one of these 1st century radicals was God.

Historically, what could have caused that? The followers of Jesus said: Well, something extraordinary happened to Jesus that didn't happen to the rest of them. Jesus was the only one whose body was never found. Dead bodies don't come back to life again. Except this once, and that's why it's so earth-shattering. Objection number 2:

2) There are alternative explanations. Well, it's true. People do come up with alternative explanations for the resurrection. But the thing is: you can't just dream up an alternative theory and think you've disproved the resurrection. You've got to come up with a theory that fits the evidence better. I just want to mention a few interesting facts that armchair sceptics tend to forget when they trot out their alternative theories:

i) The first people to find the empty tomb were women. All four gospels agree on that. And the first person to speak to the risen Jesus was a woman. Now, in that culture at that time, a woman wasn't considered a credible witness. We might not like it, but in Jewish, Roman and Greek society the word of a woman wouldn't stand up in a court of law.

This is what historians call a 'criterion of embarrassment'. In other words, if you were making up the story, there's no way you'd put that detail in. Because it makes your whole story lose credibility. It's an embarrassment. In fact, a second century philosopher called Celsus uses exactly this point to discredit Christianity. He writes: 'This faith (Christianity) is just based on the testimony of some hysterical women'.

Now, if you're a gospel writer, that's called shooting yourself in the foot. If you want to discredit your story, the perfect way to do it is to call on eye-witnesses that nobody will believe. *Unless you believe you have to put that detail in the story because it really happened that way.* One British historian says incidental details like the women in the story are 'gold-dust for the historian', because they point to what really happened. Historically, it has to be the case that a group of women found the empty tomb, and were convinced they'd met Jesus and spoken with him, several days after people saw him die.

ii) The Gospels disagree over details. The stories of Easter are different in each of the gospels. Their accounts of what happened is different, and so are the words they use to describe it all. So, doesn't that undermine their credibility? No - for a historian it's the opposite. It proves the gospel writers didn't copy the story from each other.

The gospels are based on eye-witness accounts of what happened. For example, Mark's gospel is based on the personal recollections of the apostle Peter. So we've got four independent accounts, that go back to early sources, that haven't been harmonized. Again, it's a criterion of embarrassment. If the early church wanted to present a credible, polished case to the world, they could have harmonized the inconsistencies.

It's like people standing in different places, each giving eye-witness accounts of a car crash. They'll disagree over details, but if all they all agree on something, it's likely to be true. What do the gospels all agree on? A group of women found the empty tomb and claim to have met the risen Jesus. Ironically, the fact that there are minor factual discrepancies between the gospels makes them more reliable as history.

iii) The eye-witnesses didn't see a ghost, or a vision of Jesus. How do we know? Because from the start they used the word 'resurrection' to describe it. In the ancient world, resurrection only ever had one meaning: a dead person coming back to life with a new physical body. There were lots of words in Greek and Hebrew for visions and hallucinations and ghosts and spirits. But the eye-witnesses and the early church use a specific word: resurrection. They'd met Jesus and eaten with him: they saw he had a new body.

iv) It surprised everybody. This is important. Nobody was expecting this to happen. But haven't we already said a lot of Jewish people believed in resurrection? That's true. But they all knew resurrection was going to happen at the end of history, when the dead would be raised and judged by God. There was nothing in the whole of Jewish culture or religion, or anywhere else, that suggested anybody would be resurrected before the end of history, in the here and now. It simply wasn't anybody's expectation.

Most people are very conservative when it comes to beliefs. It takes a lot to get somebody to change their beliefs, especially a strong set of beliefs that have been drummed into them all their lives. But the unanimous view of all the early Christians was something totally new and shocking: that Jesus of Nazareth had been resurrected with a new body, in the year 33 AD, not at the end of history.

Again, there was nothing in the whole of Jewish culture or faith that even hinted their Messiah would be raised from the dead. Not a thing. In fact, the very idea would have been a contradiction in terms. People were expecting a Messiah who'd set up an eternal kingdom from Jerusalem and defeat their enemies. If somebody claimed to be the Messiah and was killed, that would prove he wasn't the Messiah. By definition! Again, criteria of embarrassment. The early Christians were insistent on the very thing that would most discredit their case: Jesus was the Messiah, but he still died.

Then they add an ending to the story that nobody expected or believed in: a resurrection in the middle of history. Again, you wouldn't make it up. You'd only make up details that sounded plausible to your audience. And that detail wouldn't be plausible.

v) Jesus really was dead. If you read the account of the crucifixion, there's an incidental detail thrown in: a Roman soldier pokes a spear into Jesus's side, and there's a flow of blood and water, separated out. Forensics experts today say the fact that these fluids had already separated in Jesus's body is evidence that he'd died.

But let's say Jesus didn't die on the cross and remained alive. Maybe he revived in the cold of the tomb and his friends stole the body. But that theory's the most far-fetched of all. Three days before, Jesus had been flogged to within an inch of his life, with a whip that would have gouged out most of his back.

He then hung on a cross for several hours, held up by nails in his hands and feet. He then lay without food or water for 36 hours. Then his followers had to overpower a large Roman guard who were charged on pain of their lives not to let anybody near. They had to move a stone that weighed as much as a Renault Mégane.

And all to claim Jesus had risen from the dead. Which a) They knew wasn't true, and b) Nobody would believe anyway, because nobody had any categories for a resurrection before the end of history. And c) They were willing to suffer persecution and martyrdom for this belief, even though they knew it wasn't true. Not very convincing, is it?

But there is a scenario that fits the evidence. It explains the rise of the early church. It explains why the early church all believed in something neither Jewish nor Greek thought had any expectation of, or any concept of. It explains why they were willing to die for their faith. The scenario is this: *it really happened*. Jesus really did rise from the dead.

We're almost at the end of our series on existence of God. In Part 1 we found something fascinating: the cutting edge of science points towards a moment when the universe began, and a guiding intelligence that ensured the right circumstances for the development of stars and planets and life on earth. What that points to is there being a God. But it doesn't tell us much about God, except that he's powerful.

Last week we found that in each of us there's something we take for granted, but which has big implications: a sense of right and wrong. I have a conscience that tells me that irrespective of my own preferences, some things are right, some things are wrong. Every time a child says 'That's not fair', they're appealing to a higher moral authority than themselves. And we found that attempts to explain away our sense of right and wrong, or reduce it to evolutionary instinct, don't work. What all that points to is a God who's not only powerful but good. Who gives us our categories of right and wrong.

This week we found that the best explanation of the extraordinary events of 33 AD, and the origins of the early church, is that Jesus really did rise from the dead. What that points to is a God who's *powerful* and *good* and *who's active in history, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus*.

I've deliberately taken a calm, logical approach over the past three weeks, to show that faith isn't irrational, that it's supported by evidence. But if you've found this series at all convincing, your response can't be calm and detached. This is evidence that requires a verdict. It's an invitation to faith. That might mean going deeper in a faith you already have. But for some people it might mean finding faith for the first time. Maybe this series of talks will be the moment some of you here today look back on, as the time you took your first significant steps of faith in Jesus Christ. I hope that's the case.