

**"Proof"**

**Grove Presbyterian Church  
29 November, 2009  
Kirkin'o th' Tartan Sunday**

My daughter's question:

*Where's the proof of Jesus Christ? We have fossils and DNA but where is the proof that Jesus Christ existed?*

Who is this Jesus?

To orthodox Jews, Jesus is neither prophet nor messiah, but a "stumbling block" who denied the authority of the Torah.

To Muslims, Jesus is a prophet, the son of Mary but not the Son of God; in fact, to them he never was crucified.

To Jehovah Witnesses, Jesus is a perfect man but not co-equal with God.

To Hindus, Jesus was a mystical incarnation of God, among many others.

Some Buddhists view Jesus as a good man; others view him as an enlightened man.

The point is: Jesus is someone all religions reckon with.

And so do we.

Yes, Penelope, we have evidence of Jesus, Jesus as an authentic historical figure. Actually, it is harder to attest to the existence of Mohammad or Moses than Jesus. There are five factual extra-biblical references:

1. Josephus
2. Babylonian Talmud
3. Tacitus
4. Seutonious
5. Pliny the Elder

But do you hear what stirs within this question? The young, bombarded as they are by opinions, blogs, overload of information, pundits, 'bloviators and blowhards' want something to hang their hat onto. Something reliable. A desire to be passionate about something.

In a maddening world, what is true? What is real?

Can we prove Jesus?

Even if we could prove, would they believe?

For that matter, where's the proof for most of the critical issues upon which we hang our fates and fortunes?

Could this explain why we go nuts over such things as the Shroud of Turin? When, from an evidentiary basis, it's irrelevant. It's unnecessary. A curiosity, but so what? Is it going to make a difference in what you believe about Jesus Christ?

What can be proved?

What cannot be proved?

We tend to get the whole notion backwards: *Only when it is proven true, will I believe.*

There's a dead-end approach to all thinking and doing. That's like saying, "Only when I am convinced I am loved, will I love..."

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There is a new breed of atheists that wish to do more than offer thoughtful critiques of religion. The intent now, among those who are ironically referred to as fundamentalist atheists, is to mock, ridicule and insult the religious. Which is all rather amusing because they deny the existence of God but isn't their atheism their God?

Besides (to paraphrase C.S. Lewis) it takes a believer to accuse God of being a hoax, even yell at God for being an imbecile, a sadist. Atheists haven't earned that right.

Basically they're making the same mistake as Marxists, mistaking Christianity for some of our Christians.

For example, Hitchens, a columnist for *Vanity Fair* and author of the book *God Is Not Great*, told a capacity crowd at the University of Toronto, "I think religion should be treated with ridicule, hatred and contempt, and I claim that right." His words were greeted with hoots of approval.

The new atheists counter that they believe in reason, science and freedom from religious myth. And, as

Lindsay, who replaced Kurtz, puts it: "We take the high road, the low road, country roads, interstates, highways, byways, - whatever it takes to reach people."  
 . -- NPR "Morning Edition" report, October 19, 2009

Straw men are easy to debunk. To win a argument you lead attention away from the real argument. You set up the image of what you want to criticize and then you go about enjoying proving both your wit and wisdom. Easy and cheap. Like sticking your bayonet into the straw mannequin. Much harder to stick your bayonet into someone fighting back.

A cheap atheist argument challenges those who are religious to prove the existence of God, prove that Jesus is resurrected. Well, as we've said before: who wants a God who can be proved?

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Well of course religion is mythical and un-provable. What's the problem? Rather silly criticism. Just don't confuse myth with fiction or faith with lack of reason. William James pointed this out in his lectures in Edinburgh a hundred and eight years ago when, in describing the experience of religion, he simply described how God is to be used, that religious is ultimately egoistic (not be mistaken for egotistical).

...so long as men can USE their God, they care very little who he is, or even whether he is at all. "The truth of the matter can be put," says Leuba, "in this way: GOD IS NOT KNOWN, HE IS NOT UNDERSTOOD; HE IS USED—sometimes as meat-purveyor, sometimes as moral support, sometimes as friend, sometimes as an object of love. If he proves himself useful, the religious consciousness asks for no more than that. Does God really exist? How does he exist? What is he? are so many irrelevant questions. Not God, but life, more life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life, is, in the last analysis, the end of religion. The love of life, at any and every level of development, is the religious impulse."

We use God. We who are religious give this view our blessing. We believe our God offers God's self to be used for our sake.

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Did Jesus exist? We have evidence that the man did. But does that address who Jesus was and is? This issue isn't the man but is he Lord? The Savior?

What really can be proved?

Gravity?

Gravity isn't proved. But it is a theory that makes a whole lot of sense. I believe it. I observe its consequences.

Science proves nothing. Scientists only make suggestions on the basis of what they observe.

The same with religion.

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.*

**Hebrews 11: 1-3**

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Today is our Scottish Day. We in our bold-face, wanton chauvinism proclaim the world-wide influence of Scotland in inventing the modern world.

We are prone to remind people that Thomas Jefferson was an eloquent synthensist. When he wrote the Declaration of Independence, he was quoting Scottish philosophers, educators, and documents.

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*

Can I prove any of this?  
Can I prove the equality of man?  
Can I prove unalienable rights?

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We turn to Scottish common sense moral philosophy, the fertile intellectual soil from which our America grew and

blossomed. Scottish Philosophy affirms how truths become self-evident. Does it make sense?

Truths are experienced as reasonable rather than reasoned to be true.

Let's apply that to faith. When I read scripture, for example, must it be reasonable for the story to be believable? Or do I experience it and then it makes sense?

Do I understand to believe? Or believe to understand?

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Has the theory of gravity been proved?  
 That Scotland invented the modern world.  
 Is Penn State is the best team? Define best.  
 How can I prove that the Mona Lisa is a beautiful painting?  
 Can I prove my love is like a red red rose?  
 Can you even prove your father or mother loves you?

Proof?

We do not live and move and have our being on the basis of proofs. We live and move and have our being on the basis of what we believe, what we affirm.

Instead, we publish and declare. With our lives. Our fortunes. Our sacred honor.

We conclude.

Can I prove Jesus is lord?

But he sure makes the most sense in this senseless world.

For we are called not to prove.

We are called to give evidence.