

THE STORY OF REALITY PART 1 - REALITY & GOD (Video 15:55)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What things stood out to you as you watched the video?
- According to Greg Koukl, what is Christianity?
- What is the basic liability we face in our culture when talking with someone about our religious beliefs?
- What is a general way for a person to determine if his worldview is correct?

• Food for Thought: *Falsifiable and Verifiable*

A unique characteristic of our story is that it is falsifiable— in principle it can be shown to be false—but that also means it's verifiable. Since our story is about reality, we can test reality to see if it's true. We're able to marshal persuasive evidence that God is real; that Jesus existed, was executed on a Roman cross, and walked out of his grave three days later; that the world was designed for a purpose; that there is an afterlife—and a host of other important things pertaining to our story. This is why Christianity is one of the rare religions that has apologetics as a subset of its theology.

- In what sense is a worldview like a puzzle, and how does this analogy challenge us to evaluate different aspects of our worldview?
- When we say our story is “true”, in what sense are we using that word? Why is it important to make this clarification?
- If you heard someone say a Christian is a bigot for believing his religion is right and other religions are wrong, how could you respond?
- What are the five words that describe the backbone or plotline of the Christian story? Do you think they capture the basics of the Christian worldview? Why or why not? How is this basic plotline helpful for you in understanding the story yourself and relating it to others?
- What is the proper relationship between God and nature?
- Why does everything belong to God, and why is that important?
- Discuss some specific ways our lives would be influenced if we really understood that the story was about God's purposes first, not ours.
- Discuss some examples of nonphysical things—things we cannot perceive with our five senses, but that are real and that we experience every day.
- Discuss the different ways both Matter-ism and Mind-ism fail to account for the problem of evil.

• Food for Thought: *Limitations of Matter-ism and Mind-ism addressing the problem of evil.*

Almost everyone agrees the world is not the way it ought to be. That's the problem of evil. Yet neither of these alternatives can make sense of real evil, much less answer the challenge. In Matter-ism (materialism), nothing can be wrong with the world since there is no right way for the world to be in the first place. Everything is just matter in motion and that's it. In Mind-ism (monism) there's a different route to the same problem. There cannot be a problem of evil, even in principle, since Mind-ism, even morality is maya – illusion. In neither story, then (if we are to be consistent with their principles), can the issue of evil be raised. In real life, though, the problem of evil comes up all the time. That's the difficulty.

ACTION POINTS:

- This week, ask a few Christian friends the question “What is Christianity?” and see how they respond. Offer the insight on this question that you learned in this lesson and see how they respond. Do they agree or disagree? Why?
- Offer the five-word plotline of the Christian story to a friend or family member— even your kids. Briefly explain how the parts are connected to each other and how they give the “big picture” of Christianity.
- This week, try to find someone who is a materialist (Matter-ism) of some sort and also someone who leans toward Eastern religions. In separate conversations, be a friendly student of their ideas. Ask them about their beliefs and why they hold them. Probe a bit on the problem of evil and see how they deal with it in light of their individual worldviews.

THE STORY OF REALITY PART 2 - MAN & JESUS (Video 13:18)**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- What things stood out to you as you watched the video?
- Talk together a bit about how human beings are like everything else in the universe, and also how they are unlike everything else. What are the ramifications of the similarities and differences?
- Discuss your understanding of what the soul is. Are humans the only creatures with a soul? Which worldview denies that humans have a soul, and what are the ramifications of that denial?
- Humans are unique in another way too—in a dark, disturbing way. Talk about how the Christian story is uniquely positioned to make sense of that characteristic of humanity.
- Read Genesis 3:1-7. How is the temptation offered to Adam and Eve a common temptation today? Discuss examples in our culture and also in our personal lives.
- Read Genesis 3:14-24. How does the story account for evil in the world?
- Talk about the connection between Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1-3. What is the significance of these two passages?
- Although Jesus was man, what kinds of things did he say that indicated he was more than just a man? Why were the Jews especially upset about these claims? (See Matt. 4:10, 14:33, 28:9; Mark 2:5-12; John 5:18, 8:58, 9:35-38, 20:26-29; Heb. 1:3, 1:6, Is. 44:6 with Rev. 1:17-18)
- Discuss the idea given about what Jesus was rescuing us or saving us from. This point is controversial with many Christians. What do you think about it? Do you think it is accurate or inaccurate? Why or why not?
- Discuss why, if Jesus' claims were not true, then he was either a bad man or a madman. What are the implications of this idea?
- Name three different religious views that portray a different kind of Jesus. Discuss how these portrayals are different than the Christian view.
- Regarding the second most important question to answer about Jesus, describe what Jesus did not come to do as his main mission.

• Food for Thought: The Historical Jesus

Our reasons for believing that Jesus existed and also that he was who he claimed to be—the God who came down—are the same reasons for believing any fact of history: the documentation is substantial, and it passes all the tests of historical reliability. Scholars—both liberal and conservative—overwhelmingly agree that Jesus of Nazareth was a man of history, and the Gospels, on the main, tell his story accurately.

Show me any other person who appears in the historical record with such regularity who turned out, in the final analysis, to be fiction. Why are there so many mentions regarding Jesus from such a wide variety of sources (Pliny, Tacitus, Lucian, Josephus, to name a few)? Here's why: Jesus of Nazareth was a man of history who made a profound impact on history.

There's no good reason to doubt Jesus existed, or to think the real Jesus was completely different from the one depicted in the story. People who think Jesus never existed are simply not acquainted with the ample research done even by secular historians that provides abundant evidence for his life. The idea that Jesus did not exist at all is drivel, and real historians know it.

ACTION POINTS:

- This week, take stock of your own life and ask yourself in what areas you are tempted to think that God is holding out on you and not trustworthy. Talk with God about it. Be candid with him and ask him for insight and help with your struggle.
- Based on what you've learned in this session, think about how you would explain from a Christian perspective why there is evil in the world. Ask people if they think something is wrong with the world. If they do, ask them what they think it is. Does man have any responsibility for that? Do they individually have any responsibility for that?
- This week discuss with some others the significance of God coming down to earth. What would that look like? What sort of characteristics would we expect to see of a man who was actually God in the flesh? In what ways did Jesus exemplify these characteristics?

THE STORY OF REALITY PART 3 - CROSS & RESURRECTION (Video 10:13)**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- What things stood out to you as you watched the video?
- In addition to the horrible pain of death by crucifixion, there was a greater anguish Jesus experienced. Discuss the difference between the two and why the distinction is important.
- Describe the transaction that took place at Calvary. What was unique about it? What difference does that “trade” make for each Christian individually? What is the significance it holds for the safety and security of the believer? How does this truth impact you personally?

• Food for Thought: The First Step

God's first response to evil in the world was to become a human being himself. The Word entered history in the person of Jesus, lived a sinless life of humility, then died as a substitute for us, taking on himself the punishment we deserved for breaking God's laws. Jesus paid for our crimes against God so we could be forgiven by God.

Each person now has a choice. He can surrender his sins to God and believe in Jesus, or he can continue in his independence and eventually pay personally for his own crimes against his Lord.

When a person chooses Jesus, he is forgiven of his sins. He gets a new nature and a new start on life. God comes to live in him, giving him the ability to overcome sin and to overcome the power and influence of Satan's harassments.

This is part of God's answer to the problem of evil. More will come later, but for now, instead of destroying all evil in an instant—and the evil people who are responsible for it—God patiently waits for men and women to turn to him through the God-man who died to make pardon a possibility.

- How does understanding what took place on the cross help you understand why Jesus is the only way to salvation?
- What are some of the inaccurate definitions people assume about “faith”? Read the following verses: John 10:38, 20:30-31; Acts 1:3, 2:22. How do these passages demonstrate that the classical view of faith is not blind or irrational?
- What is the good news and the bad news about the story's ending?
- At the final event of history, one of two things will happen to every person. What are they?
- Read these verses: John 1:12, 3:16-18, 5:24, 6:37-40, 6:47, 10:24-30, 11:23-27, 20:31; 1 John 5:13. What is the basis for the perfect mercy some will receive?
- Some people think that being away from God's presence will be a good thing, giving them a kind of freedom. Why is this a horrible mistake?
- Reflect on some of the things that will be true following the final resurrection. How do those truths influence your attitude about the troubles and tribulations Jesus promised us in this life?
- As you think through the summary elements of the “plotline” of the story (God, man, Jesus, cross, resurrection), what things stand out to you? Are there questions you still have regarding the Christian worldview story? What are they?

ACTION POINTS:

- Think about the distortion the word “faith” has experienced in our cultural—and even Christian—use of the term. Walk through the steps you might take to correct the misunderstandings people have. How would you respond to an atheist or other skeptic who insisted on using his own definition of faith to critique the Christian view?
- This week, reflect on the big picture—the unity, the cohesiveness, and the future promise of the story of reality. Share with others some of the things you've learned during this series. How has it changed your thinking about God or about your Christian life? How, possibly, has it changed your life?