



WHY GOD EXISTS (7 SESSIONS)

THE PAINTER AND THE WISE OLD LADY

7 SESSIONS

MONDAY

There was once a painter who lived in a small village deep in the countryside. He spent all day carefully painting beautiful pictures which he would sell in the market. It was a peaceful job and he had plenty of time and silence to think. Sometimes he would have questions about life that he couldn't answer by himself, so he would go to see a wise old lady who lived in a cottage on the edge of the town.

Her life was peaceful too, but instead of painting she read books all day. One Monday morning, the painter arrived to ask a question that had been bothering him for more than a week. The old lady made him a cup of tea and he sat down to explain.

'You believe in God, don't you?' the painter started, sipping his tea.

The old lady nodded. So the painter frowned and asked:

'Can we prove that God exists?'

The old lady replied that many people thought they could prove that God exists.

'How?' demanded the painter. And this was the old lady's reply:

'Look at the flowers. Look at snowflakes and diamonds. And butterflies. Think about how beautifully and carefully they are made. And they work much better than anything made by humans. We could never build a machine that lays eggs to make copies of itself so that it can carry on reproducing for millions of years. We are not clever enough, even though we are very clever. So that means that whatever did make the animals and plants is something like us but more intelligent and powerful than us. What is more intelligent and powerful than humans? God. God must exist because if he didn't there would be nothing to create all the amazing things we see.'

The painter listened thoughtfully and waited a long time before he replied...

TUESDAY

The next day was a Tuesday. The painter worked hard all day in his studio. But there was another question buzzing around in his mind all day and it wouldn't go away. So when he had finished work he walked down to the wise old lady's cottage again. Once she'd made him a cup of tea, he told her what was on his mind.

'It's the same question as yesterday,' he admitted.

'So the answer I gave you yesterday didn't satisfy you,' she laughed.

'I'm afraid not,' said the painter, 'Are there any other ways to prove that God exists?'

'Oh yes,' replied the old lady 'Listen to this. Why does the rain fall?'

'Because it gets too heavy for the clouds,' said the painter.

'Why?' she asked.

'Because there's too much water in the water for the clouds to hold,' said the painter.

'Why?' she asked.

'Because it evaporates from the sea' said the painter.

'Why?' she asked.

'Because the sun heats it up' said the painter.

'Why?' she asked.

'Because the sun is hot' said the painter.

'Why?' she asked.

'Um... because it's burning?' said the painter, not quite sure, 'Maybe a scientist would know.'

'The wise old lady leaned forward to explain: 'But if the scientist was here I could keep asking her the same question - Why? - over and over again, couldn't I? If she tells me what makes the sun burn I can ask what causes that. And what causes that. And what causes that. On and on. Do you think it goes on for ever? No. In the end, there must be something that isn't caused by anything else. There must be a cause at the front that starts everything else off. That cause is God. Nothing

caused God. God caused everything.’

The painter nodded his head slowly and thought about what she had said...

WEDNESDAY

All day Wednesday, the painter got on with his work happily. But he kept on thinking about the two conversations he’d had with the wise old lady. And when the sun went down he headed off to her cottage. She chuckled when she opened the door.

‘You again? Come in. What is it this time?’

The painter told her that he still wasn’t sure that you could prove that God existed.

‘Alright’ said the lady, as she handed him his tea, ‘What about this? Imagine a perfect being. A perfect thing. Nothing is wrong with it. Can you imagine this perfect being?’

‘Yes,’ murmured the painter, ‘I think so.’

‘The meaning of the word ‘perfect’ is: nothing wrong, nothing missing, right?. Now, if the perfect being didn’t exist then it would have something missing. The perfect being wouldn’t be perfect. But that doesn’t make sense. So the perfect being you imagined must exist because if it didn’t, it wouldn’t be perfect. Well, that perfect being is God.’

The painter had to ask the lady to say all this again. But in the end he did understand. Or at least, he thought he did. But he had a few questions...

THURSDAY

The old lady was not surprised when she opened the door at the end of the day to see the painter standing on her doorstep again.

‘Sorry,’ smiled the painter. ‘Are my questions annoying you?’

‘No,’ replied the old lady, inviting him in, ‘Your questions are good exercise for my brain. Sit down and I’ll make you a cup of tea.’

The painter explained what he had been thinking about that day:

‘Why doesn’t God just prove to us that he exists? I mean, he could just make this cup of tea turn to stone, or dust, or gold.’

‘You mean, God could do a miracle right now?’ asked the old lady.

‘Yes’ said the painter.

‘Have you read about miracles that God did?’

‘Yes,’ nodded the painter, ‘But that was years ago, in the old times’.

‘Why do you want God to prove himself again? He has proved himself lots of times in the past. Think! If I wanted to prove to you that most of our planet is covered in sea, I could take out a map and show you. Would you want me to prove it again the next day, and the next week, and so on for ever?’

‘No’ said the painter.

‘So you see. God has already done what you asked. He has done many miracles for humans. He doesn’t need to do them over and over again.’

As usual, the painter thought about this argument for a little while, before replying...

FRIDAY

On the Friday, the old lady already had a pot of tea ready for the painter when he arrived. He looked annoyed with the problem that had been stuck in his mind all week. He asked how many different ways there were to prove that God existed and which one was the best.

‘I’ve heard lots of ways’ was her answer, ‘And I’ve told you the ones I think are best. But now I have a question for you.’

The painter leaned forward in his chair, ready to listen.

‘What if God doesn’t want to prove he exists?’ she suggested. ‘What if he wants us to have faith? He wants to see who is faithful and loyal. He won’t be able to tell who really follows him if everything is proved. Look at the cup of tea in your hand. Do you believe in it?’

‘What do you mean?’ laughed the painter. ‘It’s a cup of tea.’

‘Exactly. You can see it. You can feel its heat. You can taste it. So of course you believe it exists. Everyone believes in cups of tea because it’s so easy to prove they exist. But it’s not so easy to prove God exists. So God can tell who really trusts him.’

The old painter had never thought about it like that before.

SATURDAY

The painter told the old lady that he wouldn’t come on Saturday. On Saturdays he didn’t work. Instead, he went shopping for all the food he would need for the next week. He said that because he was busy he would have no time to think about questions like these. But just after lunch the old lady heard a knock on the door. It was the painter, carrying his shopping.

‘Sorry to keep bothering you’, he shrugged. ‘But I have another question. There’s something I need to ask you..’

'Go ahead,' laughed the old lady, inviting him in. 'What's your question?'

'It's about the cup of tea yesterday' he said.

'Would you like a fresh one?'

'Yes, please.'

The old lady gave him the cup of tea, saying: 'Now, what's your big question about this cup of tea, and what's it got to do with God.'

'Well,' the painter explained, 'Yesterday I said I was certain that the cup of tea existed.'

'That's right, because you could feel it and see it and taste it'

'But it could be a dream,' the painter interrupted. 'In my dreams I can feel things and see things and taste things that don't exist. So just because my senses tell me something exists it doesn't mean it really does. I could be dreaming now. I could be at home in my bed and dreaming I'm here with you holding this cup of tea.'

'That's true,' the old lady nodded. 'But that might help you prove that God exists.'

'How?' scoffed the painter.

'Listen carefully', she said. 'You can't be certain that the cup of tea exists because you might be dreaming it. Right?'

The painter nodded.

'But you CAN be certain that you are thinking about whether it's a dream or not. Even if you are just thinking about it in your dream, you are thinking about it. You don't know if the cup of tea is real, but you do know that you are wondering now if it is real. Those thoughts exist, even if they are only thoughts. It's impossible to believe they don't. So now you know something very important: you know how to tell if something exists. It exists if it's impossible to believe it doesn't exist. So now think about God. Is it possible to believe that he doesn't exist? If it's impossible to believe that he doesn't exist, then he must exist.'

The old lady and the painter carried on talking about this for several hours.

SUNDAY

On the Sunday, the old lady was sitting by herself at her window, looking out at the people who passed by. When she saw the painter coming up the road, she got ready to open the door. But the painter didn't look over to her house at all. He just trudged glumly by, deep in thought. Wondering what could have made him look so unhappy, the old lady went over to the door, opened it, and called to the painter.

'Hey, no questions today? What's the matter?'

The painter stopped, turned, and said: 'It's all a waste of time. Everything we said.'

'Why?' the old lady demanded, looking startled.

'I met this young man down in the market. He told me he could prove that God DIDN'T exist.'

'Maybe you'd better come in,' the old lady suggested.

The painter came in and sat down. When the old lady brought a cup of tea for him, he just left it on the table beside him. She asked him what the young man had said.

'The young man said that God is supposed to know everything. That's right, isn't it?'

The old lady nodded.

'And also God can do anything. He created the world so he can make anything he wants happen.'

The old lady nodded.

'And God is good. Completely good, always.'

Again, the old lady nodded, then she waited patiently for the next part of the argument.

'But what about when terrible things happen? People get killed in earthquakes. Or little babies get hurt in accidents. It's not their fault. He can't be punishing babies because they haven't done anything wrong - they're too young to know. So why doesn't he stop things like that happening? If he knows about them, and he has the power to stop them, and he's really good? That proves he can't exist. Or if he does, he's not good.'

The old lady was smiling to herself. She shook her head.

'You're forgetting something,' she reminded him. 'God knows everything. But we don't. We don't know enough to understand why God does what he does. Sometimes, yes, but not all the time. The only person who could understand what God does, and why, is God.'

The Painter smiled again at last. He even picked up his tea and had a long, slow, happy, sip. Then he frowned again.

'But wait a minute...' he said, suddenly. 'I've got another question.'

The old lady settled back into her chair, ready for another long conversation....

Task Questions

- ✓ Ask the same questions for each session/day

- ✓ Do you think the wise old lady was right?
- ✓ What do you think the painter said/thought?