

# Atheist Saved by The Truth Of The Sovereign God

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Without Jesus Christ there is no hope, there is no truth with a capital 'T', there is no, even external objects - there is no chair. There is just complete loss, there is darkness, and there is blind searching out, and just not being able to feel or find anything. My name is Michael, I'm from Columbia, Missouri, I've been saved a little over a year. About a year and a week and a half. I was saved on campus, actually, at the University of Missouri here. There was an evangelistic outreach from a group in Kirksville.

Winding backwards, there are a lot of threads that as I've walked with the Lord, I realize more and more how great a tapestry it was. Starting back a little over, probably about 10 years ago when I was about 13, 14, I remember I sat in my bed because I was raised in a house where God existed, but there was no real Christ, there was no real religion. It was just "God exists" and if you're good, then you'll probably get something at the end of it. But I remember hearing something about maybe God doesn't exist, God doesn't do all these really remarkable things anymore. So I sat in my bed, and I said to myself, "Well, God doesn't exist." And I pulled the covers over my head, and I wasn't immediately struck down with a lightning bolt, and so from then on it was sort of, "Well, maybe God doesn't exist." And it seemed to be at the time, very freeing. In terms of, now I can do anything.

You know, I think it was Neitzche who said that "If God is dead, then all acts are permissible." So everything suddenly became open to me and I started looking for anything and everything that could explain anything, starting with the premise that God doesn't exist. And so over the years, I sort of had this thorn in the back of my mind. And I went to a Lutheran church, I asked a woman to be my godmother, that really came to nothing, I had no drive or unction to read the Bible, to attend the church.

And so, having all that fail, I started really getting into philosophy. I started really reading guys like Descartes, Neitzche, Freud, the newer atheist guys later on, like Dawkins and Dennet, and all of these guys, and basically searching and scrambling for absolutely anything that seemed like truth to me. It didn't necessarily matter if it was provable outside of myself, just that it seemed right. I mean, it says in Scripture that "there is a way that seems right to a man but its end is death." And it really sunk me down low. There was no real value to any of it. I've still got the scars very faintly on my arm, that testify to how low I got in depression and all of these other things, and I just tried to seek absolutely anything else.

And so I tried to become this intellectual. Tried to go through men to find the reason for everything, since men are all that we have. And so, to that end, I started studying, at the university: philosophy. And getting really into all of these theories about how, going from Descartes, you can't prove anything outside of yourself, outside of your own mind. As I've said to people before, I could really, earnestly make you believe, at least entertain the idea, that the chair I'm sitting in doesn't exist. That the house I'm in right now isn't real. You know, it's like Morpheus said in that movie, "What are experiences, outside of electrical signals interpreted by

our brain?" And if you go to the logical conclusion of that, really they're nothing. Which means that we are nothing. Which means that everything is inconsequential. So what's the point?

And, you know, that just sort of stuck, and I started being okay with that. But as I started studying more and more, I took a class, probably a year and a half to 2 years ago now, on the varieties of religious experience, because it seemed to me that regardless of my lack of faith, there was something still valuable about faith. There was still that thorn that said that there was something amiss.

And so, in the varieties of religious experience class, I really got a sense of a faith in faith, and I valued people who had faith, because it seemed like there was something else. I didn't know what. I was just looking for it in men, so the 'it' became what I was looking for in terms of truth. Lower case 't'. And so, through seeking that in this class, and from reading one of Richard Dawkins' books, actually, a strident militant atheist, leading me to consider the things of God is pretty glorious. He considered it a perceptual burka. Which essentially what he means by that is when you have a burka, you have a very small window of perception, and there's so much else. And the 'everything else' that humans can't possibly perceive, was an idea that really stuck with me. I really started considering what that could mean, if these religious experiences that I was learning about had anything to do with that, if there was any reality to them. A lot of them just seemed like they could be anything that anybody happened to experience on a cold day, and there it was just, "ok, whatever."

But there was something in the very core of it that seemed to resonate. Something was more real than electrical signals. And so I just started thinking about that, thinking about those things, and I decided, well, maybe there is something beyond human capacity. A very broad thought, but that was 4 days before the Kirksville evangelical outreach, where I was sitting and mocking an 'I'll Be Honest' card, about how you will know the truth and the truth will set you free, and I was sitting with 2 friends of mine, we were talking about how ludicrous that is. You know, truth can't exist outside of perception, and the perception is based on faulty whatever.

And we were just laughing about this, and a girl from Columbia came up and talked to me, and just asked, "Can I ask what you guys are talking about?" Obviously she knew what we were talking about, but it was that conversation that really led to me just thinking more and more about the things outside of myself. After about an hour, my 2 friends left the conversation, tried to pull me away. But there was something different about this person, something real. Something that really struck me about this person. And I couldn't put my finger on it, but I really wanted to continue talking to her, so I continued talking to her for about 2 hours, I think, after that, so it was about a 3 hour conversation, at speaker's circle.

And then we parted ways, I think she was sort of pulled away because I guess a lot of people there are kind of used to talking to atheists and are sort of hesitant to follow up on that because there's a lot of, just, animosity (strong dislike). I mean, I started mocking them, was how the conversation started, so. It became very clear that what she believed, she believed so much more than anything that I believed. That she had to have some kind of truth that I was just not privy to (aware of) at all. I had no idea what she was referring to, what she was pulling these arguments out of, because I was trying to get at her with any sort of argument I could. About morality questions, about really sort of painful questions, about like, abortion, and all of these other things, murder and rape and all of these things.

And really what struck me, was every single response that she gave was essentially the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the good news of His coming, and His dying, and the reality of sin, and that's all that she would say. There was no argumentation. There was discussion about what I was bringing up. But the argument was, essentially, this doesn't really matter, what matters is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And she kept nailing that home, over and over again.

And by the time we split, it was, there was a real drive to want to read the Bible, to see what she was talking about, if any of it was true. And so I started asking around, you know, what types of Bible do you guys read? There was a bunch of translations, I'd heard all of these arguments about how we can't trust all of these different translations because they've been translated so many times from so many different people. But after a little while, there was a Bible that just sort of showed up. This friend of mine who came to Kirksville was talking about me, apparently she had brought me up for prayer. Someone from the church had an extra Bible that they had happened to bring one day. They just sort of said, "I already have one, but I'll bring this one just in case." It was a small, tiny little guy. And this friend of her's gave it to her to give to me, and I started reading it. And I started with John, and I started just, really considering the things of God and wondering what was actually happening to the world, essentially.

And I continued talking to this friend of mine who met me on campus, and through a lot of these conversations about all of these things that I wanted to talk about, she just kept pointing me to the gospel, pointing me to the gospel, and eventually it just broke down to "I need to let go of all of these things that I'm starting with, because I was starting with the position that God didn't exist." And so, adding anything to that, if it sort of contradicted any of my previous premises, clearly something new had to be wrong. But I was unwilling to accept that God could exist. And so, you know, I was reading things on...

There was an article by Horatius Bonar about letting go and falling into the hands of God. That was instrumental. I was reading about the Lord's work in people in Africa who had never heard the gospel, and He's saving these people, I was hearing about all these amazing works that the Lord has done, all the while thinking, "ok, even if the Lord is real, then I must be reprobate (beyond salvation)." Because, you know, He didn't care. I said that He didn't exist, I didn't believe, and nothing had happened to me. So clearly He just wasn't paying attention or wasn't going to do anything for me.

But through reading the Scriptures, through talking with this girl to eventually just hearing her say, "You just need to believe. You can do all of these things, you can try to figure out your own way, your way to salvation, but essentially what you need to do is just believe. You don't need to work yourself up, you can't work yourself up to a perfect righteousness," because I've already sinned. "You can't work your way to being heard by God because you've already sinned, you've already fallen short." And, you know, it suddenly started to make sense. Yeah, okay, if all of this is true, that she's telling me, it's consistent with what the Bible is saying.

So I was sitting in my basement at the time, and I just decided, "Okay, well, I'll pray." I'll start just talking to the Lord and asking... I didn't know who I was talking to at first, but I started just talking. And the first few times, it didn't really seem like anything was really happening, nothing was really going on. But I had told her that I had prayed. And she said, "Well, do it again. And keep calling out. And keep knocking, because the door will be opened." I didn't know

what that meant at the time. But she just said, "Keep praying." And so, I did. I prayed over and over again.

And eventually, it started to seem like something else was happening, I was no longer talking to my ceiling, I wasn't having my voice bounce off of walls, I was being heard. Someone was listening, someone was understanding, and I was able to just pour out all of these things that had been going on. My animosity towards the idea of God, because nothing happened to me when I was trying to prove that He existed, or didn't exist, as things may be. Nothing happened. So clearly He wasn't there. I was really angry with Him, you know. But who was I angry with? I just kept asking Him, if I could be saved, please just let me know. And I started, just... "Okay, I'll test it." "I'll say I believe. I will believe, just to see if anything can happen." And so, you know, I tried to really clear out and scientifically test it; get away all other variables and just say, "Okay, the one variable that needs to be changed, is I need to believe." So I started acting like I believed. I prayed like I believed. And it wasn't like a play-acting type of thing, it was really putting myself in the position to believe. And the more I did that, the Lord provided, very little, a few crumbs, but enough for me to go, "This is more than anything that I could have ever thought of." And my faith just grew by leaps and bounds in those few days until a point where I really I believed that I believed, but I didn't really believe. You know, it was about a week-long period where I sort of believed that I believed. I was going through these things.

And one day at work - I worked night stock - so I stocked shelves all night, and I was driving home one day. And I was stopped at a stop sign. The sun was coming up in the morning. And there were these clouds in the sky, and the sky was really orange, and all of these things, and it was just sort of a normal day, normal sunrise for the most part. But I started to - I was thinking on the things of God, thinking about Christ, and suddenly, I couldn't have told you at the time, but John 3:16 suddenly became real, and became about me. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Well, that became "God so loved Michael, that He gave His only begotten Son, that if I were to believe on Him, I would not perish, but would have eternal life." And so, that hit me as real. Not just as an idea, like, I've read it, but it hit me as a reality.

And I'm looking at this sunrise, and suddenly it pops, it becomes this Van Gogh painting, and all of these rivets in the paint start to become more real. And as this happens, I start to realize my sin. If Christ is real, if Christ has died for me, how wretched am I, what have I done to deserve this? There is nothing that I could possibly do that could bring me to Him, and yet He still has died. If He is real, and I am... I mean, truth with a capital 'T' started to come in. If He is real, if He has died, and I am this wretched, what can I possibly do, what can really be real? And suddenly it all started to pour on me, I just started to get huge conviction, like what could I possibly have been doing with my entire life, that I could put just, such... insult to the Creator of the universe? And the reality of Christ, the reality of my sin, the brevity (shortness) of life, all of that. The beauty of all of creation which was testifying to God, all of it hit me at once.

And, you know, there are so many people that have different, so many different testimonies, in that regard, when all of that happens in stages, but all of that hit me at once, like a brick in the head. And I just started, I broke down at my sin, and I was laughing at my - at Christ, and just overjoyed that Christ was a reality, but I was weeping at the same time, that I

had sinned against Him, and I was crying and weeping and laughing and doing all of these things, this huge mess of emotion on my drive home for the rest of the time.

And I just started, when I got home, when I got home I was calling out to the Lord, thanking Him for Jesus Christ. Tables and chairs - suddenly I wasn't doubting their existence anymore, I was just so overjoyed that there was something outside of myself, some bedrock (solid foundation). You know, and when I got the reality of judgement, you know, it says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom. I was just so afraid, but it wasn't a fear that, you know, I was going to fall off of a high building or something like that. It was a reality of who He is. He had revealed Himself to me a lot.

I mean I related so much to Saul, when he was... condoning, I guess, the stoning of Stephen, when his garments were thrown at his feet. He was condoning it, he was endorsing it. He approved of it, he wanted it to happen, and then he was on his way to Damascus to persecute more Christians. That's what I was doing on campus. As an atheist, I was sitting at Speaker's Circle, talking to these people, yelling at these people, calling them fools, and Scripture says over and over again, the fool says in his heart, "God doesn't exist." And it's, I mean, just how much hypocrisy there was.

And when the scales fell off of my eyes, just so much glory was just poured in, just the reality that all of these things were made through Christ, for Christ, by God through Him, for Him. All things are from Him and to Him and through Him. I mean, so much just opened up, the reality of the world suddenly just hit me, and all of these philosophies of men, all of these things that I had been dedicating myself to. Been spending so much time in computer games, been spending so much time playing tabletop games, like Dungeons and Dragons and stuff, just silly things, just wasting time, just until, basically, I was dead, because there was no point to life. You know, all of it hit me, and just this huge wide swath of glory of the Lord, and just what He is, and who He is, and what he's done, His perfect, completed work on Calvary; just how much the Lord has worked from the beginning of time to bring us back to Himself.

It's... something that, just, I can't, I still can't fully grasp the grace of it. It is truly by grace. If I had any choice in the matter I really would have just continued to run into hell with my hands over my ears and my eyes closed, screaming, and slam the door behind me; because I had no reality whatsoever. But through the grace of God, He set it up that this outreach happened, my heart had been changed the 4 days beforehand; so many things happened step by step like a domino effect, that I could not deny it. I could not... when the scales came off, it was like, it was seeing for the first time.

And, you know, there's a classic philosophical dilemma of, it's called 'The Mary Problem'. You can know absolutely everything there is to know about... the color red, say; but in a completely black and white world. If she were to then leave that world, and see the color red, say in a hallway, leaving a door, see the color red, does she learn anything? Well clearly she does. She has that experience of a reality. Of a new, an entirely new reality. Something that she couldn't have possibly imagined before.

And when your eyes are opened, suddenly you can see that, "yes there is something moving, there is a reality, we are marching off of a cliff into hell." And yet, the Lord says, "Call, and I will answer, knock and the door will be opened." And it was through the grace of God that I was even able to see that, and yet through hearing the gospel, the power of God is in the gospel

of Jesus Christ. I just had this curiosity, and I was led to read, and I was led to see more and more, and it was truly the work of God that opened my eyes to see, just, truth.

You know, I thought for a long time that religion was adding something to a checklist. "I'm a Christian, so I'm good." You know, "I go to church even on Sundays." But the call to... the call for Christianity, the call that Christ gives to those who would be His disciples is forsake everything. It's come and follow me, and He demands perfection. And clearly, no human being has ever been perfect, unless they are also God. "All have fallen short of the glory of God." "There is none who does good, no not one." And without Jesus Christ, there is no hope, there is no Truth with a capital 'T', there is no... even external objects, there is no chair. There is just complete loss, there is darkness, and there is blind just, searching out, and not being able to feel or find anything.

And that really is the lost person in general. It is the state of everyone outside of Christ. And really the only way to find anything, is through Christ, as all things are made in Him, and through Him, and by Him. And so I guess the exhortation really that I would have is to just, let go of that rope of that sinking ship, and just see that Christ is there, that there is a reality in Christ; and that He will not forsake those who truly seek Him in His means. There are so many false gospels, so many things that are just, "Clean yourself up, repent of your sins, because you're doing horrible things" and that's it. It's "repent and turn towards Jesus Christ, because He is faithful to save."

And that's just, that's been the story of my life over the last years. As things have gone wrong, as I've turned away from Him, it's always been horrible, and wrong, and it's just these things that lead to death; and Christ, while I am faithless, He is faithful to redeem and to save, and to bring us back to Himself. And so, Amen.