WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?
Program 221
Living as Practical Atheists
by Ernest O'Neill

We're talking on this program at this time each day about the question, "What is the Meaning of Life?" And many of us have felt the same kind of discouragement when we begin to think about that question because our own lives so often seem to have a contradiction at their heart. That is, many of us, I think are convinced that there has to have been some intelligent mind to create a universe as complex as ours. Most of us have got that far in our thinking.

Some of us still wonder if chance plus time produced the universe but most of us study the chart of the elements, see how cleverly one element after another fits into the system and into the pattern.

Or we look at the way the seeds are placed in the ground by a farmer and the sun and the water makes them grow and they produce food for us. Or we look at the incredible complexities of a flower or the beauty of the petals of a flower. Or we see the way the sun comes up or rather, the earth turns round every 24 hours. Or we notice the way the earth goes round the sun so regularly, year after year, century after century. And we realize that there are hundreds of thousands of earths going round hundreds of thousands of suns throughout the universe.

And we realize that there must be some intelligent mind that made all these things operate so smoothly without colliding; without crashing into each other for centuries. So most of us have got to the point where we believe there is an intelligent mind somewhere in the universe. We're not quite sure who He is.

We've studied sometimes the life of Muhammad or we've studied the life of the Hindu prophets or we've studied the life of Zoroaster or Confucius. And we see some hints in their lives about who the Creator of the world is.

But we must admit that there is none that has managed to leave this earth and come back again. Except for one person. He was a man called Jesus of Nazareth. And He lived for about 29 or 30 years in Galilee, in the Middle East, from about the year 4 B.C. to about the year 29 A.D. And He separated Himself from all other religious leaders that we respect by the fact that He did die like them but He destroyed death and came back and lived again for more than a month in Galilee.

Many of us have heard stories like that before but this man has been recorded so carefully and in such detail with the ancient manuscripts that record His life and His resurrection from the dead so plainly that we are convinced that it is historically true. And of course you can examine any of those ancient manuscripts that are so much more reliable than any of the manuscripts we have even for Cicero's writings or Plato's writings or Julius Caesar's writings or Homer's writings. These manuscripts are more reliable, more ancient than the manuscripts that support those famous writers. And these manuscripts reinforce the whole fact that this man Jesus of Nazareth destroyed death.

And of course He said He was the Son of the Maker of the world. And many of us who don't yet believe in Him know some of that story. And we know some of His words. And some of the most famous are where He said, "Look, don't be anxious about tomorrow; about what you'll eat or what you'll drink or what you shall put on. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom, His rule in your own heart, and all these things shall be added unto you. Look at the

lilies of the field. They do not toil and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

"And look at the birds of the air. They do not sow nor reap nor gather into barns. And yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than they? So if God so clothes the grass of the field that today is and tomorrow is cast into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, oh you of little faith? So don't be anxious about the morrow. For the morrow will take care of it itself."

And many of us have worked that out in our own minds.

We've thought, listen -- if the Creator of the world takes such care of the world itself, making sure that it goes round the sun every 24 hours; if He takes such care of the birds and the flowers so that they come up and they reproduce themselves reliably year after year -- then surely He's going to take care of me. And surely He knows I'm here. And surely He will look after me. And many of us try therefore, to live that way, day by day. When we see very little food left at home or we see that our bank account is getting very low or we lose our job or we can't find any work to do, we try to say to ourselves, "But wait a minute -- the Creator of the earth and the whole universe knows I'm here. He will surely provide for me."

Indeed we think of the words of that man Jesus of Nazareth, "Look at the lilies of the field. They do not toil and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." The greatest king in ancient times was not dressed any better than these flowers. And we think, that's true. The Creator of the world surely knows I'm here. Surely I'm made in His image. I'm like Him. And He will take care of me much more and much better than He has even taken care of the flowers.

And so we do our best to believe that and to relax when we lose our job or when we see very little money left in the bank or very little left under the mattress. Or we see that we don't have much food left. We think to ourselves, I mustn't get scared. I mustn't get afraid. I mustn't get anxious. I mustn't get uptight. I must relax and trust God my Father and believe that He will find a way through for me here. He will find a job for me or He will show me a way to earn more money or He will bring food to me. And we try our very best to live that way.

We say to our thoughts, calm down thoughts. To our emotions we say, calm down feelings, calm down. Trust God. That's all you need to do. But that contradiction that we talked of at the beginning of the broadcast comes into play. The contradiction between what we do and what we think, is true. We think the Creator is there. We think He will look after us. We try to behave like that but we find we cannot. We find we're getting anxious. We're getting uptight. We're getting fearful. We're worrying about where the food will come from. Where will we get our next job?

We begin to be worried and anxious so much so that at times we can't sleep. At times we bark at our friends and our relatives. We are irritated and we are impatient with them because we're worried about where we'll get our next job, where our food will come from. In spite of the fact that we ourselves think the Creator of the universe surely will take care of me. And of course we're all like that. Even if we do believe there's a Creator, we find it's impossible to lie back and trust Him. We find there's something inside us that is almost inborn atheism.

And of course that's what it is. The fact is, all our forefathers have been living as if there's no God for centuries. And they have passed that down to their children. And their children passed it down to their children and their children until it was passed down to you and me. And now we find ourselves natural little atheists.

People who live as practical atheists. We live as if there's no God. And we try to live as if there is but we can't.

Now, the good news is that even though you can't do anything about that yourself -- think how often you've tried to trust God -- the truth is, God knew that. And He changed you in His Son Jesus and the reason why Jesus came to this earth was so that He could die, to demonstrate how His Father put all of us in Him and destroyed us in Him and remade us in His resurrection and remade us able to trust our Father. Able to be free from fear. Able to relax in His arms, even when the food is getting low in the larder.

That's what is called the Gospel. That God has changed us in His Son Jesus. And the moment you believe that, that moment you begin to be able to trust God as your dear Father. Let's talk a little more about this tomorrow.