WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?
Program 36
Historicity of Bible Documents
by Ernest O'Neill

What is the meaning of the life that we have here on earth? What is the meaning of life itself? Why are you alive? Why am I alive? That's the question we're talking about.

What we've been sharing is that even though we can see a great deal of circumstantial evidence in the order and design of the universe that there is a Supreme Being who created the whole thing and therefore must have a purpose for it, yet we have said that what we need above everything else is empirical evidence of the existence of such a Supreme Being.

In other words, we need touch-and-see scientific evidence that this Supreme Being exists and that He has, in some way, communicated Himself and His own thoughts to us. Where we have got to in our discussion is the point that He has done that!

There is a remarkable time in the history of mankind which is known by us as the First Century (A.D.) when certain events and certain beings existed that persuade us that there is a Supreme Being and that this Supreme Being is communicating His own thoughts and His mind to us.

Of course, what we have been saying is that the events of that first century are historical, actual events. The history that we have of them is some of the most reliable history in existence of the world's literature.

Of course, one of the difficulties that we have to get over is the fact that we are very familiar with the book that we're referring to, except that it has become for many of us a traditional, religious,

archaic book that we have come to regard as the source of myths or as the inspiration of our greatest ethical ideals.

But we have forgotten the fact that it is a very reliable history book. When you and I ask each other, "Is there a Supreme Being? Do you think there is?" the best evidence that we have that there is a Supreme Being are the remarkable events that took place in the first century of our era that are recorded in this book.

We are referring, of course, to the last quarter particularly of the book that we know as the Bible. I've encouraged you to try to get a modern translation in one of the bookstores so that you can begin to look at some of the pieces of it as we go along through these next few weeks and months.

One of the amazing facts about this book is that it is written by eyewitnesses who were actually present when the events took place that we are talking about. You remember that I referred to one of these men called Peter who lived at that time, and he wrote in his particular contribution to that book a piece of the book that is known as the Epistle of Peter or the letter of Peter.

He actually wrote it to some friends of his in the first century. He wrote in the second letter, the Second Epistle of Peter it's called, (It's like saying Peter's second letter to his friends.)in chapter one and verses 16 through 18, he says this, "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased', we heard this voice borne from heaven for we were with Him on the holy mountain."

In other words, Peter is saying, "Stop calling me a myth. Stop calling me an originator of fairy stories. I'm not. I wrote what I saw. I was an actual eyewitness. This man Jesus that you know of, this man Jesus, you remember, was baptized in the Jordan like another ordinary Jew; this man Jesus, I saw Him. I was an eyewitness. I was actually alive at that time."

"I did not follow cleverly devised myths when I made known to you the power and coming of Jesus Christ. We were eyewitnesses of His majesty. We saw Him. We saw the remarkable individual that He was. So don't give me that! Don't say to me that I'm some kind of mythical creature or that I created myths. I am an ordinary fisherman. I'm Peter. I'm an ordinary guy who worked with his hands and caught fish in the nets. I'm an ordinary man. I'm telling you, I was alive at this time and I saw these things."

That's what we mean when we say that the events that are recorded in this book are anything but myth. They are anything but imagination. They have nothing to do with subjective, mystical visions such as Buddha had or Muhammad had. They have nothing to do with philosophical theories such as Confucius. They have nothing to do with that kind of stuff.

They are just ordinary events that took place in the first century when certain men were alive who observed those events. One of those was a man called Peter. That's the way he put it. He said, "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths. We did not just make up myths. We are not clever inventors. We are not clever writers. We are just ordinary people. I didn't follow some cleverly devised myth when I made this whole thing up to you. You're attributing too much brilliance to me. I'm not like that. I'm an ordinary man, and I saw these things."

And that's what he is saying, you see. He is saying that there came a time when there was a voice that came from beyond space and Jesus was down in the water being baptized and there was a voice that came from beyond space that said, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

Peter says that he heard this voice borne from heaven. "We heard this voice. We heard it. There were friends that heard it when He was baptized. When the voice spoke again at another time when he was on a mountain top, we ourselves were on the mountaintop and we heard that voice. What I'm telling you is things that I have actually seen and heard."

Now that is one of the factors that separate the history of this New Testament or the history of this Bible from all the other religious books in our world. The other religious books contain very little history, overwhelmed and woven through with a great deal of imagination and a great deal of myth and a great deal of unsubstantiated, subjective visions -- but the history of this New Testament is ordinary history written by ordinary men who observed these things.

Now if you say, "Big deal! He says he observed it, but who knows? Maybe he just said that so we would believe it." But the fact is, these events were not just observed by people like Peter. There is another piece in the New Testament. It's actually in another book, that is called the Acts... that the people that Jesus sent out into the world, called apostles, that they wrote. It's called the Acts of the Apostles.

In chapter 26, and verse 26 of that, one of them says to King Agrippa, in his public defense, he says (it's Paul actually), "The king knows about these things for this was not done in a corner." In other words, this event of Jesus' life was not done in a corner. The whole world knew of it at that time, so it wasn't only Peter.

It wasn't only guys like him that wrote in the New Testament. It was that all the then-known world knew about it. In other words, it was written by eyewitnesses and there were many other people who knew about it and could contradict it if they wanted. Is there any further evidence that is history? Yes. Lots more. Let's talk about it tomorrow.