What is Faith?

Why is Belief in God Reasonable?

by Ernest O'Neill Program 26

What is faith? Faith is a leap in the dark. It is an emotional whim. it is believing what you know isn't true. Is that what you have thought of as faith? I think a lot of us do and what we've been sharing at this time on this program during the past few weeks is of course that, that isn't faith at all.

Faith is actually something that we exercise almost continuously in our own lives. You exercise faith when you sit on a chair. You have faith that it will hold you up. You may say, "aww, now that's pretty certain." That isn't faith! Now, you have sat on a chair on occasion and it has failed to hold you up, hasn't it? So, it isn't mathematical certainty that it will hold you up.

You exercise faith every time you step into your car and turn the key in the ignition. You believe that it will start the engine and you will be able to get to work. You may say, "aww, no that's scientific certainty." Well, I ask you, "Have you ever stepped into the car, turned the key in the ignition and it hasn't started?" If of course often you have and the fact is that most of the activities we engage in this present life are based on faith. Faith is belief that certain things will happen and the action that stems from that belief. Of course the belief itself is based on reasonable evidence.

It's the same with faith in God. Faith in God is not an emotional whim. It is not an intellectual leap in the dark. Otherwise people like Einstein and Darwin would not have engaged in it. They both had faith that there was a supreme being. For them it was based on reasonable evidence presented to their senses and to their intelligent minds. That there was order and design in this universe. That the season's were carefully planned, they occurred regularly every year. That the stars and the planets

orbit in precisely controlled paths and they never vary from them. That the protons and the neutrons that make up even matter itself are all so intricately designed that we have not yet been able to analyse them thoroughly. Our bodies are amazing creations of careful, balanced mechanical devices. Designs that we have not yet caught up on with all of our scientific endeavor. So, the order and design of the universe and of course the personableness of you and me suggest that whoever made us or whatever made us was at least as personable as we are and had at least as much intelligence as we have. So, we have reached that point in our discussion and we have gone actually a little further. You remember during the past few weeks we have said that there is imperial evidence in the sense of touch and see. Evidence that there is a supreme being. This is in the form of course of the amazing events that took place just about nineteen hundred years ago in Palestine. You may say,"aww, now who can be sure that those things happened? Who can be sure that

this man that your probably going to talk of, Jesus of Nazareth actually lived? How can you be sure that he did the things that people say he did? It could be a myth. It could be all kinds of imaginary stories that people have built on the skeleton of maybe an originally remarkable man."
Will you remember one of the things that we have been doing during the past few weeks is examining that historical evidence. Of course that historical evidence far outstrips any other evidence for that time. Any other history of that time lacks utterly the certainty and the historicity that the evidence has about the existence of this man Jesus of Nazareth. You remember how we quoted things like Julius Caesar's Gaelic war's. We said that we accept the account that he gave of the Gaelic war's even though we have really only ten manuscripts of his account. There isn't one of them that is closer than a thousand years to the time when he wrote his account of the Gaelic war's. Yet, we accept it without any doubt. it's the same with Plato's republic. You remember we have only seven manuscripts of it. The earliest one was written twelve hundred years after Plato had originally written the republic himself. So, of course there was plenty of opportunity for anybody to get the original manuscript as he wrote it and change it and switch it. He had a thousand to twelve hundred years to do it and that is the situation with most of the ancient histories and the ancient literature. it is certainly so with Tacitus, Livy, Pliny, Thucydides, Plutonius, Lucretius, Euripides, Aristotle. When you come to the history of the man, Jesus of Nazareth as it occurs in the New Testament you enter a completely different realm of certainty. There you have not only ten manuscripts, not fifteen manuscripts, not thirty manuscripts, not fifty, not a hundred, not two hundred, not three hundred, but you have four thousand Greek manuscripts that exist between the year a hundred twenty-five A.D. and eleven hundred A.D. They far outstrip any of the evidence as far as reliable transmission of history is concerned that we have for any other Greek or Latin literature.

On top of that of course you have to be sure that the original writers wrote what they actually saw and you remember we shared that these men who wrote about Jesus of Nazareth were in fact eye witnesses. Of course we can be sure that they were eye witnesses because of the many references to people like Matthew, Mark and John, and Luke, and Peter, and James in literature. Other than that of the Bible of the New Testament. As well as that we have an amazing piece of evidence that exists in the library of the Manchester University in England. It is a manuscript that is dated by carbon dating methods. One hundred and twenty-five A.D. In other words it (blank in tape) twenty years after John had originally written his history of Jesus. Now you can see that it is only a gap of thirty years there. Then there were many people who were alive who had actually known John and knew that what he wrote was what was actually in that manuscript. Above that there were of course many eye witnesses still alive when the original records of Jesus life were circulating. All of the New Testament was in existence by the year ninety A.D. and most of it was in existence by the year sixty A.D. Now there were many people who were maybe twenty years of age at the time of

Jesus death, about twenty-nine or thirty A.D., who would only be fifty or at the most sixty years of age when the greater part of the New Testament was circulating around the then known world. All they had to do of course was say listen we were in Jerusalem at that time and we know that didn't happen. Yet, there was no great outcry like that. There it was, complete acceptance that what was written in the New Testament was actually the history of the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

You remember of course as well as that we pointed out that there is other evidence from non-biblical writers. Evidence from historians who didn't even believe that Jesus was the son of God and yet they left accounts of his own life. Such you remember was Tacitus the leading historian of imperial Rome. He wrote the author of that name was Christ who in the reign of Tiberius suffered punishment under his procurator Pontius Pilate. Josephus was a Jewish Historian and he wrote this, "there was about this time, Jesus a wise man. He was a doer of wonderful works. A teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was Christ." When Pilate at the suggestion of the principle men amongst us had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him. For he appeared to them alive again the third day.

It's because of evidence like this that we believe it's reasonable to have faith that Jesus of Nazareth actually did live in the first century and said and did the things that he is reported as doing and saying in the New Testament.