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WHEN WAS GOD BORN? Michael B. Beough
Ps 90:1-2; Ps 93:1-2; Ps 102:25-27; Rev 1:8 January 11, 2009
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When I started planning this worship series, I had no idea that atheists would be putting signs on buses in London. Have you heard about this? The sign says:

“There’s Probably No God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.”

I picked up this news article off the internet:

These words are tattooed on 800 buses – and soon perhaps other public transportation – throughout Britain, primarily in London, as an atheist group has launched a widespread advertising campaign at the cost of about 140,000 British pounds, or \$200,000.

The campaign, sponsored by the British Humanist Association, came in response to a series of Christian ads that supposedly instructed passersby to visit a Web site where text said that nonbelievers would spend eternity in hell.

When I first saw the sign, one word especially caught my attention. Can you guess which one? “Probably.” Now this British Humanist Association has scientists in it. The most famous one is Richard Dawkins. He is what is called a militant atheist. I have read his book *The God Delusion*. He believes that if we get rid of God and all religion, the world will be a perfect place. Since scientists deal with probability, I guess they felt compelled to give a little wiggle room. But can you imagine getting on an airplane and the pilot saying we will probably land in Paris later today? I believe I would want off that airplane. And what’s this about not worrying and enjoying your life? How does not believing in God help you stop worrying when you have lost your job, or lost your house, or lost a loved one, or get cancer?

On the other hand, as I thought about this atheistic media campaign, a thought came to me. If there were no god, we wouldn’t have to deal with tough questions children ask. Like, “When was God born?” This is a question I got from a child for this sermon series. I got several questions like that. *If God created everything, who created God? When did God make everything?*

If God didn’t exist, we could just say to our children, “Don’t be stupid. There is no God.” But you know what? Children are smarter than that. Children who ask about God’s origin are not stupid. They are asking a fundamental question that has been asked by humans since the first humans began observing the world and wondering where it came from.

Now here is the beauty of this question about God's origin. **It forces us to come clean about our own sense of place and purpose in relation to creation and in relation to God.**

It goes like this. Children are very concrete in their thinking. They take things quite literally. How many times have I been mistaken for God? The first time it happened, I felt, well, honored. I wondered why more people couldn't see it.

One thing children learn early on is that everything has a beginning and an end. It is only natural that they think the same thing about God.

This awareness of finitude doesn't bother them much at first. Not until they are told they have to stop doing something that they want to keep doing. Like playing. They might bawl their eyes out because they don't want to stop. Why can't they just play forever? Why do they have to go to bed? They start arguing with finitude. The other day, one of my grandchildren said, "Give me five reasons why I have to stop!"

But then it goes deeper. Perhaps a pet dies or a grandparent. Eventually, this sense of finitude causes them to ask at some point, so, what does it all mean? What does my existence mean if everything, including me and everything I love, comes to an end? All of us end up asking that question and finding an answer. We can't help but ask that question. And as our children mature, they will begin asking that question, too. Just as the people in the Bible asked that question thousands of years ago.

When our children ask about God's origin, they are forcing us to answer the "meaning of life" question. Is there anything other than the beginning and end of all things? Is the most we can about life is that we all die?

So what will we tell them? "There's probably no god?" Or will we point them to this book, the Bible, where we find a spectacularly unique and energizing answer to our deepest questions about life?

Here is what we find in this book. The answer to the meaning of life is the God who exists from everlasting to everlasting. Let's consider several passages that can be helpful as we respond to our children's question.

The psalmist in Psalm 90 identifies God as the One who "brought forth the mountains" and "formed the earth and the world." All that we see and are came into being by the will of the God who is "from everlasting to everlasting." All of us are children of this eternal God who has no beginning and no end. God is our cosmic parent.

Now notice that the psalmist does not argue that God is eternal. He assumes it. His purpose in this psalm is to give courage and hope to his people.

Psalm 90 begins the fourth Book, or fourth section of the Psalms. It is the section whose purpose is to give hope to the people of God who have been in a literal captivity. Book III, or section 3, of the psalms are filled with laments and complaints. Book IV soars with the assurance that the everlasting God has not forgotten them nor forsaken them. The eternal God remembers His people and will deliver them. In other words, this God is a good God, favorably disposed toward humans.

Imagine the people of God in captivity in a foreign land. They have lost everything, their homes, their country, their loved ones. They are sitting out on their porch one evening in Babylon when a bus comes down the street. On the side is the message, "There's probably no god. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life." Can you imagine these people who have lost everything but their faith saying, "Oh, that's reasonable! Why didn't we think of that?" No, I think they might think, "What a cop out! What a reduction of the meaning of life! What snobbery! Who's behind it and what are they trying to do to us?"

The psalmist in Psalm 93 has a different answer to the plight of the people. The everlasting God rules. The Lord is King. The psalmist says God has established the world, and with it our very being. Then in verse 5, this psalmist addresses God. "Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O Lord, forevermore." God not only has the power to liberate them, but can also be trusted beyond question. Can you imagine the loudspeaker on that bus coming through your neighborhood? There is Richard Dawkins in the driver's seat. He sees you with sadness on your face. He announces as he whizzes by, "You're on you own. Good luck. Trust me. There's probably no God."

People of biblical faith insist that this whole created order is in the hands of this eternal God. The Uncreated One. Therefore, we can have confidence because we know, as the song says, "who holds tomorrow". The psalmist does not try to explain how God can be everlasting, without beginning and without end. He just knows that this is the only God who is worth bothering with. This is the only God worthy of our trust.

The psalmist in 102:25 finds great assurance in the eternity of God. Like all the other psalmists, he knows that we are finite beings. We were made that way by a power beyond ourselves. He says to God, "Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands." Then he goes on to say, "They will perish, but you endure . . . you are the same, and your years have no end."

Then he shows us in verse 28 the depth of faith and assurance that comes by knowing this eternal God. "The children of your servants shall live secure; their offspring shall be established in your presence."

One of the most important roles we have as parents, grandparents, Sunday School teachers, and friends is to help our children come to know this God who is from everlasting to everlasting. The good news is that this God has taken the initiative to make Himself known to us. In doing so, God makes us known to ourselves.

Whatever else we may be concerned with, whatever else we may direct our lives toward, all our living occurs against the backdrop of eternity. There is more to life than time. Time exists by the will and plan of God. You and I have to live through time. But time is not the whole enchilada. There is a realm beyond time, outside time, and intersecting with time, that is inhabited by God and by all who respond to God through the doorway to eternity we know as Jesus Christ. The Bible says all who believe in him shall have eternal life, life in a new dimension even as we walk this earth in the knowledge that all this shall perish.

How do we respond to our children's questions about the origin of God? Why not begin by admitting that we have had the same question. We do not have all the answers. But we believe what the Bible says and what our experience teaches us. God has no beginning and no end. In this God, we will trust, until the end of time.

In Revelation 1:8, there is a vision of God at the end of time. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.