

CAN A MAN LIVE WITHOUT GOD? RAVI ZACHARIAS

John Ankerberg: Welcome to our program. I'm John Ankerberg. I'm glad that you joined us today. And my guest is the brilliant Christian philosopher, apologist, Ravi Zacharias, Ravi has talked to more university students in more countries than anybody I know. And I've asked Ravi in the weeks to come to speak to folks in different regions of the world. And starting next week we're going to answer the questions of college and university students from the far east. Then we're going to move to questions from students in the middle east. Then we are going to go to questions from Europe. And then from students here in America. So, that's kind of the outline. And, Ravi, I'm really glad that you are here. And I want to come back to a question that you were asked to present to Harvard University. And these lectures were so well received that they actually became a book. And the question they asked you to answer was, "Can man today live without God"? And if you folks in the audience are listening right now, if I asked you, "Is our culture jettisoning God? Are we disregarding him"? I think you would agree, yeah. And our university students are saying, "I can live without God". I want you to especially listen to what Ravi has to say today in answering this question. Ravi, we are glad that you are here. Start us off.

Dr. Ravi Zacharias: This question goes back across centuries. In fact, even when you open the book of Genesis, right from the beginning. You know, the whole question, I think, of deciding to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, how God had phrased it and how the tempter phrased it. That God reminded humanity that if you did that, in that day you will surely die. And the tempter comes and says "No. No. No. In the day that you do it you will become God". You see, two completely opposite perspectives. And what was at stake here was, who is going to play God? Are you going to play God? Or, are you going to allow God to be God? So, the question goes back right from the dawn of creation. And now we attempt to live that way. And all of a sudden we are finding out that there are no fences left. There are no points of reference left for definition. And I see this happening globally. And the world is in chaos

The whole question, "Can we live without God"?, whether we like it or not is haunting us in government, in families, in the academy, and as we are raising it for our personal lives. G. K. Chesterton said "Whenever you remove any fence, always pause long enough to ask why it was put there in the first place". So, the moral law struggle has gone back across time. It's a struggle you and I live with every day in our choices. And when you have God in his person-having revealed himself through the Bible as I see it, the old and the New Testament, who has defined that the law is for our benefit: it is for our well-being. That's why David said, "I will delight in your law". Those who turn their backs upon the law, I have a very simple illustration for them in a mildest form. It is an old rabbinic expression: God is like the light: blessing and success, prosperity issues are like the shadow. If you walk towards the light, the shadow will follow you. If you turn your back upon the light and chase the shadow, you will never ever catch up to it.

And that's why I think it is so critical, even to our audience, to those of you who are listening in, every decision you make, every decision you make, ultimately is based upon that commitment, or the absence of commitment, to God. Your moral reasoning, your familial choices, how you spend your money, how you deal within business, how whether people can take you at your word or not. All of those issues are built upon the foundation of your belief or disbelief in God. That's why, when you go back to the encyclopedia, the great books of the western world, the longest essay is on God. And when Mortimer Adler was asked why, he looked at Larry King, the questioner at that time years ago, and said, "Larry, because more

consequences for your life follow from this one issue than any other issue you can think of". So you are spot on. And I believe that is a question that needs to be answered.

Ankerberg: You say that there are four things that we are going to miss if we leave God out of our live: if we think that we can live without God. Let's take those four things. What's the first one?

Zacharias: The first one is an absence of a point of reference for moral decision-making. There is no more an ontic referent, as the philosopher will say it. There is no more objective truth. There is no more an absolute. Let me give an illustration to the listener, for example. I come from India where traffic is the topic of songs. You know, they say if you live here in Bombay and its Dodge and Bob and weave and all of that. But when you come to a red light what is it telling you? Stop!! Now, some people might think it's telling them it is Christmas and they keep going. But it's actually to tell you to stop.

Now, when you are at the stop light and you are daydreaming a bit, and you see the car in the next lane and you are wondering whether he's moving or you're moving. What is it that you really do at that moment? Instinctively you go for the brake, because the light is red, you can't move. Now, when you are not sure after you put your foot on the brake whether you are moving or the other person is moving, what do you do next? You look out of the window, look for a tree or look for a building, that which is not supposed to move, and measure yourself by that. Now, that is the indicator of an absolute: something that is immovable.

I like to give another illustration. It's a clock maker in Leichester, England, who has... Who's found this man stopping outside his shop every day, synchronizing his watch with the clock. So one day he looked to the man and he said, "What do you do this every day for"? He said, "Well, I'm embarrassed to tell you this. I'm the timekeeper in the factory nearby. At four o'clock I have to ring the bell every afternoon at the end of the day. My watch doesn't work very well, so I synchronize it with your clock every morning". And the clock maker says, "That's really funny, sir, because actually my clock doesn't work very well either. I adjust it with the bell from the factory at four o'clock every afternoon when I hear the bell ringing". What happens when two wrong watches are synchronizing themselves with each other? One will have to pardon the grammar, but they'll get "Wronger and wronger" every time.

When there's nothing immovable: when you're synchronizing it with that, with that which itself is such a reciprocal way of doing things, you will end up with a culture in total chaos. There is no absolute: there's no point of reference. That is precisely the moral framework. And there is one statement I will never forget from Auschwitz. Walking through from room to room and seeing Hitler's statement outside the gas chambers, which said, "I want to raise a generation of young people devoid of a conscience: imperious, relentless, and cruel". That to me is the logical outworking of relativism. And those who trumpet the triumph of relativism have to realize that is the slippery slope on which we step when we do away with the absolute.

Ankerberg: Yeah, what was the second thing that we lose if people jettison God, if they say God does not exist, or I'm going to live as if God doesn't exist, there really is no meaning in life.

Zacharias: That is the most existentially felt reality, with the absence of God. And those of my fellow countrymen in India, the young people especially, will understand this very well. We are looking for meaning: there are songs that are sung in the popular Indian movies that ask for meaning: what does life really mean? I'm not God, I'm not the devil, I'm a human being, but what does that mean? Define a coherent set of answers, John, to the existential questions of life. That's what brings meaning into my own soul. The Greeks would talk about it as sort of harmony. Now we talk about it as sort of coherence with the culture. Or we use

sociological terms like shared meanings of the past. All of these are anchored to one idea: that in my life I have found meaning. And to me the irony is the more successful, even the most wealthy, will tell you this to looking for it.

Sort of Lee Iacocca, the Tycoon from the days of automotive success in his life, he said, "Here I am in the twilight years of my life, still wondering what it's all about. I know this," he said, "Fortune and fame are for the birds". Jack Higgins, "I've learned that when you get to the top there is nothing there". Boris Becker, the great tennis player who said, you know, his biggest struggle was still with suicide, having obtained all these trophies. The loneliest moment in life is when you have just experienced that which you thought would deliver the ultimate and it has let you down. To me as a 17-year-old that was the question. Moral issues and all, yeah, they were all theory: but existentially what does my life really mean? Why am I here in this world? What have I accomplished? And what is life beyond the grave? So meaning is the existentially relevant issue to which Jesus Christ really speaks and brings me back into a relationship with him, from which I define all other relationships.

Ankerberg: I love the story of you, when you were speaking in Manila in the Philippines. And a young man stood up in the back of your lecture when you were talking about "Does life have meaning"? Tell what happened.

Zacharias: Yes. I finished my talk and this guy just springs up. You know, I like to give them at least one ground rule, which is keep your questions brief and one question per person. But he just shouted out, he said, "Everything in life is meaningless". I said, "That's not true, you don't mean that". He said, "Yes, it is"! And we went back and forth. I said, "No, you don't mean that"! He said, "Yes, I do"! I said, "Say it again". He said, "Everything in life is meaningless". I said, "You don't really mean that". He said, "I do! Who are you to tell me I don't"? I said, "Alright, let's have this interaction. Remain standing. I assume that you assume that what you just said was meaningful. Am I right"? And he just paused. I said, "Because if what you just said was meaningful then everything is not meaningless. On the other hand, if everything is meaningless, what you just said was meaningless too. In effect you have really said nothing: you are free to sit down".

And, you know, he just stared at me, John, like I had sort of stabbed him in the chest. And what's the true part of the narrative is, as to continue, as I finished and we were walking out, I saw this guy standing in the back pacing the floor: "If what I just said was meaningful, then everything is not meaningless". And so I went toward him, and I put my arm around him. I said, "I know what you are struggling with". I said, "I know why you are saying it". I said, "Do me a favor. I am speaking at a local church tonight. Why don't you come and I will give you some private time after that". He came. And, John, when the invitation was given that evening to trust Jesus Christ, he was the first to step out of one of those seats there, walk up to the front, drop on his knees at the altar and surrender his life to Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "I'm come that you might have life more abundantly," which put simply means he puts it all together to bring you the wealth of your inheritance as a creature created by God.

Ankerberg: Yeah. God gives us moral absolutes: he also gives us meaning in life: but there's two more. We're going to take a break. When we come back I'm going to ask rave to talk about the fact of without God there is no hope. And without God there is no recovery. You will want to hear this so stick with us, we will be right back.

Ankerberg: Alright, we're back. We're talking with Ravi Zacharias who has talked to probably more university students about the Christian faith than anybody else that I know. He has traveled to seventy countries: he goes to at least twelve countries every

year, does five round the world trips every year. How he does it, I don't know. And he speaks in these pressurized situations, to the intellectuals of our time. And, Ravi, we are talking about, "Can man live without God"? And if people choose to live as if God doesn't exist, there are ramifications. Give us a summary of where we are at, then let's continue.

Zacharias: The question that I think is the reigning question of our time. All the others are really footnotes to this question: Can man live without God? And I did actually two lectures and Q&A, and the third one, I had other panelists join me from the student body. It was a fascinating third session, and then went into print as a book. Can man live without God? My, my four points were that, and I think there actually a lot more. But if you take just these four that define our lives: I said the loss of a point of reference for moral absolutes, that you really are governing your own life by whatever your conscience tells you or what your intuition tells you.

Now, the problem with that is, in a world with so many different cultures, so many different religious perspectives, so many different forms of education, you are on a collision course at that point: because what is good for one may be a cursed thing to another and vice versa. So we need to have a moral absolute that is objectively true for all of us. Is it objectively true to say, "I have no right to take a sword and lop off another person's head, and do that with my own moral precepts and my own prerogatives, and do it on display in public television, and consider that a triumphalist thing? Is that morally right or wrong? What does our intuition say to us? Chances are somebody listening is going to say, "You know, it's okay if it's revenge done by someone". Someone else is going to say. "No, it's a horrific thing that you have done". What is the transcending point of reference to which we can point? Is it morally abhorrent to torture a baby for your own pleasure? And if so, where do we get that objective moral value from?

So the fact of the matter is, we need an objective standard by which we point. Scientifically speaking you can't have your own law of gravity and I have my own law of gravity: you have your own law of thermodynamics and I have my own laws of thermodynamics. No. There are specific laws and precepts that are given. So it is in a moral universe, which is what this world is. So we need that objectivity. Secondly, the question of meaning. Now, this becomes obviously more subjective, but not as readily as you may think so. Let me tell you why. Recently a founder of an atheistic society against religion passed away. As you and I are speaking right now, it just happened a few days before. And interestingly enough, she was an atheist, followed the Bertrand Russell dictum that when she was put into the soil her body was going to rot. That's what prompted her daughter to make the statement that "For my mother, because death is the end and the body rots, therefore life is precious".

Now, I found that fascinating. That's not what she was actually meaning. What she meant was, her life was precious because she raised millions of dollars in the obliteration of other lives in the womb. And so I say, if you really think life is precious, what prompted you to fund the elimination of thousands of,...? Now, I know those are painful questions, but it is a legitimate question when somebody makes a statement that life is precious. So, I believe life is precious, but I believe all of life is precious, because all of life has intrinsic value, not extrinsic value given by government or state or culture. Now, the only way we can talk about intrinsic worth is if we are created by God himself, an entity of essential worth. Life can only have meaning and purpose if life has essential value, and then has purpose and significance.

So I think these two realities, for the non-theist or the atheist or the anti-theist, are really unanswerable questions. Oh, I know they try to answer them, that we have to live and let

live. You've seen what tolerance has done in our time. What it really means is: A's view is valuable: B's is dispensable. No, no. In a true world of tolerance and acceptance we have to respect each other's views and dialogue on that meaningfully: because life is meaningful.

So I believe in knowing Jesus Christ, he who is my Savior, who laid down his life for me, and was willing to offer love and forgiveness for me who never even sought after him, but he perused me, "Like the hound of heaven". And there in that hospital bed, as I tried to take my life, found out that my life was meaningful, not because I was an a student or a b student or a c student, but my life was meaningful because I was a creature created "Imago dei," in the image of God. My moral reasoning and my essential worth comes to me from my Creator. That alone enables me to pursue his purpose and his pattern and his design for my life.

Ankerberg: Yeah. Jesus Christ also gives us hope beyond the grave, and without Jesus Christ you have no hope beyond the grave. Talk about that.

Zacharias: This is very real. I have attended so many different funerals in Thailand, in India, in South America, Middle East, other places. What happens when a person dies? You know, some will say just bury them before sunset and this is a ritual and so on. Others will just sit around the, the corpse and say nothing, the silence. It is interesting that Oscar Wilde, who was the quintessential hedonist, at his funeral-by the way, which was held in the same church in Paris where pascal's funeral was held-you know, to read the... Do the research and find out there was no music. Imagine in a pleasure driven life there was really no music at that funeral. And on his gravestone is a verse from the book of Job. Hope is something we all long for.

And, John, it is important that the listener follow this: not only because I want to find meaning beyond the grave, but if there is no life beyond the grave, what happens to justice? What happens to the person who has committed atrocities and just, then just puts a bullet to his or her head, and is this all over? Is there no balance to be set straight afterwards? So hope is not just a particular need in my life, for me to see life beyond the grave, or to see my loved ones again. It has to do with the quintessential question of justice as well. In Jesus Christ, this is the most beautiful thing about the Gospel, the resurrection from the dead, the transformation of three lives. Thomas, who sees the risen Lord, "Ho Kyrios Mou, ho Theos Mou," "My Lord and my God". The transformation of Saul of Tarsus to the apostle Paul who writes one third of the New Testament. And then the brother, his brother James. Hope beyond the grave redefines everything.

Billy graham was talking to Konrad Adenauer once. As Adenauer was looking out of the window. Dr. Graham told us the story around a table. And Konrad Adenauer looked at him and he said, "Mr. Graham, do you really believe Jesus Christ rose again from the dead"? And Billy Graham said, "Mr. Adenauer, if I didn't I would have no Gospel to preach". He said there was silence. And then Konrad Adenauer said, "You know, Mr. Graham, outside of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, I know of no other hope for mankind". And to those of you who are listening to me, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is defining for everything.

Let me say, just say one more thing to you about that. If Jesus were a charlatan, do you know what he would have said? He would have said, "I will spiritually rise again". How do you falsify that after you find the body? He said, "No, I am bodily going to rise again". That bodily resurrection was the concrete empirical evidence and the genuineness of the sincerity of the truth of Jesus Christ. I know when I die I will be with him and also be with my loved ones who have known him and trusted him. Trust him where you are. He gives you hope not only for the future, hope for now, meaning for now, and the moral ground on which to define your life. See, ultimately the problem is not morality. Jesus Christ didn't come into this world

to make bad people good, and he came into this world to make dead people live. We are dead to God: he makes us alive to him. You can find that hope in him.

Ankerberg: Folks, this is tremendous stuff. And there is more to say, and we're going to probably cover this in the weeks ahead. But next week we're going to turn to a very, very interesting topic. There are very brilliant students in all parts of the world, and they come at these questions differently, and they're really searching. And I want to go back to Ravi's homeland and other countries in the Far East. So, questions university students, the questions that they have about God that they have proposed to Ravi. I'm going to take some of the very toughest ones and ask him to answer them next week. And so I think you're going to find this fascinating. Hope you will call a friend and tell them to join us for the broadcast. And I hope you'll join us then.