Nice Try.
(Now, Let’s Get the Record Straight.)

**Shroud First Christianity?**

With yours truly as his muse, David created a new term out of (yes, I’m going to say it) “whole cloth”: “Shroud-first Christianity.” Dragging this red herring around, he hopes to misdirect attention from the Shroud’s evidentiary importance in proving the truth of Christianity onto something completely irrelevant —whether I place too much importance on the Shroud (any time someone claims that there is no evidence for God’s existence.)

Atheists do their best to infuse doubt regarding the credibility of historical evidence that goes towards proving the Judeo-Christian God’s existence. Moreover, they have, historically, claimed that science *disproves*, beyond a reasonable doubt, that God exists, or, in the alternative, that science fails to *demonstrate* that God exists. However, in a grand reversal of fortune, Christians, now, have the weight of science\(^1\) in *their* corner.

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1. The Shroud of Turin is the claimed burial cloth of Jesus Christ.

2. Many atheists are fond of pushing the narrative that the universe has always existed. Scientific evidence, however, is pushing the narrative that the universe has *not* always existed —that there was some sort of first cause (or “big bang”) which brought the universe into existence. Also, in the material world, we do not observe life springing forth from non-life. This, of course, begs the question of how did life spring forth from nothing when the universe was first created?

Moreover, there is a large body of scientific evidence from top experts around the world supporting the Shroud’s authenticity —and even evidence from the Shroud’s bloodstains that evidence the resurrection of Jesus.

It should be noted that the Shroud’s much-ballyhooed radiocarbon dating results (which dated the Shroud to medieval times) have been almost universally portrayed as bulletproof —despite the fact that archeologists are well aware that it is not uncommon for radiocarbon dates to be wrong. This is, often, due to contamination of the item to be tested.

Moreover, the radiocarbon testing protocol that had been set forth for the Shroud were breached when *all* of the samples to be tested *came from the very same place* on the Shroud —the corner. As fate would have it, this corner happened to be one of the most contaminated areas on the Shroud, because this was the very area where the Shroud was usually held when either displaying the Shroud or folding or unfolding it. As such, the radiocarbon results should be seen as highly questionable in light of the aforementioned facts, and in light of there being such a body of evidence that points to the Shroud’s authenticity.
When scientific evidence, along with historical evidence (Biblical\(^3\) and non-Biblical\(^4\)) are combined — they prove Jesus’ existence, Jesus’ deity and God’s existence beyond a reasonable doubt.

The compelling way that the Shroud’s bloodstains mirror the Gospels’ account of the Passion of Christ cannot be overstated. And, that’s without my even mentioning that the Shroud, itself, is a miracle,\(^5\) and that it, also, evidences another miracle —the resurrection of Jesus.\(^6\) Boom! When you’ve got the catbird seat, you sit in it.

I will say, however, regarding my skeptic friends on S & S, I really do not think that they have spent much time learning about the Shroud. This is why I think that they so easily discard “conclusions” about it —especially in light of the highly publicized, and seemingly damning, radiocarbon test results in 1988. It is because they have not both learned about, and discussed, all of the testing that was conducted to arrive at those conclusions. Once they learn a lot more about the Shroud, maybe they (or someone) can come up with a reasonable explanation for how they have reasonable doubt about the Shroud’s authenticity in light of the entire body of evidence that authenticates it. I would be very interested in hearing their arguments.

David talks about how he (now an atheist) was going to church a minimum of three times a week and was a church leader in three different denominations and that he never once met anyone who believed in the Shroud. Well, David, were you routinely

\(^3\) https://www.josh.org/8-manuscripts-validate-new-testament/

According to New Testament scholars and biblical linguistic experts Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, “When compared with other works of antiquity, the New Testament has far greater (numerical) and earlier documentation than any other book. Most of the available works of antiquity have only a few manuscripts that attest to their existence, and these are typically much later than their original date of composition, so that it is not uncommon for the earliest manuscript to be dated over nine hundred years after the original composition.”

\(^4\) An abundance of ancient Biblical manuscripts exist which have been shown to be reliable by way of passing the “bibliographical test.”  https://www.bethinking.org/jesus/ancient-evidence-for-jesus-from-non-christian-sources

\(^5\) There are numerous features of the Shroud of Turin which remain inexplicable. To date, nobody has been able to reproduce anything like the Shroud with all of its unique features on one linen cloth —despite ongoing efforts to do so.

\(^6\) For a one-stop place for more scientific articles than you can ask for on the Shroud of Turin, please visit https://www.shroud.com.
asking people around you about the Shroud and whether they believed in it? Even if you did, this proves nothing. If I go and ask those same people whether they know about some concept dealing with astrophysics, they, probably, won’t know about that, either. That, however, doesn’t make the concept invalid; it just speaks to those individuals not having much, if any, knowledge on that subject.

I think that David is correct that the Shroud of Turin is not routinely studied in seminary. They seem to focus on the Bible. Perhaps, the faculty in seminaries should come to the realization that if they teach their students that compelling scientific evidence can prove beyond a reasonable doubt that God exists, they will notice a decline in Christians abandoning their belief in God and falling into the hopeless abyss of atheism. Either way, what is taught at seminary school has no bearing on whether the scientific evidence supporting the Shroud’s authenticity is accurate or not. It speaks nothing of the evidence.

Regarding my allegedly questioning the “faithfulness” of any Christian who would dare deny the Shroud’s authenticity, I have not done this. David is mistaken.

Also, just to be clear, I’m a “God-first Christian.” I place great importance on the Bible —since it tells us both our history, our future and how God wants us to live. There are, however, some aspects of the Bible that give non-believers and on-the-fence-believers doubts which, sometimes, turn into a rejection of God. Pound for pound, I think that the Shroud —in conjunction with the Gospels, science and secular history— stands a much better chance of persuading a skeptic to become a Christian than the Bible, alone, does.

During the podcast, David asked me if I thought that the Bible was the word of God. I explained my understanding that the Bible was divinely inspired by God. I, also, explained that I think it is possible that there could be some differences in different translations and interpretations of the Bible, but that this does not really impact the take-away that the Bible gives us.

The Shroud does not reveal God’s plan for us —only the Bible does this. As such, it is important for people to know the message that the Bible has for mankind.

I received this message through many years of going to church, Sunday school and having Bible classes at the church schools that I had attended for several years. Although I, most certainly, know fewer stories from the Bible than David and many of the other atheists know, it is clear that their knowledge of those peripheral stories made no difference in their decision to abandon God and his rules and his promises for the
irrepressible freedom of a godless existence. If going to church three times a week couldn’t strengthen David’s faith, then, perhaps, it is something else entirely that keeps some Christians strong in their religion and that leads other Christians away from it.

**The Problem of Evil**

David thinks that we need to “spend a lot of time sweating the details or ramifications” of things like (1) whether Satan, angels and demons actually exist, (2) the problem of evil/Satan, (3) temptation, (4) whether God needs Satan around, (5) if there is a real war between God and Satan, (6) why God might need Satan to do all of the tempting, (7) whether we would still sin if Satan wasn’t around to tempt us, and (8) why God doesn’t get rid of Satan. For me, such pondering are about as useful as trying to figure out how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Moreover, it’s just an invitation for wild speculation. Additionally, even if we have the correct answers to these questions, of what use are they unless we, somehow, become privy to all of God’s plans with regard to these issues and issues that relate to them. I equate questions like these with stirring the pot. They do nothing more than incite the half-hearted Christian with one foot out the door to leave God.

**The Word of God**

As to my response to the question about why I think that the Bible is the word of God, I mentioned that the Bible indicates that this is what it is by way of telling us what Jesus/God said. I, also, added that the Shroud of Turin [through its depiction of bloodstains consistent with a crucified man that had a crown of thorns on his head] conforms with the distinguishing and identifying details from the Bible [about Jesus’ crucifixion], and that makes the Shroud compelling evidence that the information in the Bible is true.

David characterizes this as a circular argument, but I disagree with this. While books in the Bible indicate that they contain the word of God, the Bible’s credibility is evidenced by the miraculous and mysterious Shroud which mirrors the crucifixion details that are mentioned in the Gospels. As such, these two, separate pieces of evidence have

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7 There are additional aspects of the Shroud [that I did not get a chance to mention during this podcast] that, also, conform to what the Gospels said happened to Jesus before, during and after the crucifixion process. Some such examples include the post-mortem side wound in Jesus’ chest that emitted “blood and water,” no broken legs to expedite death [as was the norm for crucifixion victims ], a proper Jewish burial for a crucifixion victim in a fine linen cloth [this would be very unusual for a crucifixion victim other than Jesus], no putrefaction on the Shroud and intact meniscuses on the perimeters of the Shroud’s bloodstains which evidence that the body that had been wrapped in the Shroud miraculously got out of the Shroud without pulling up/disturbing the edges of those bloodstains when the linen was separated from the blood clots on the body.
important and unusual internal consistency between them which makes them compelling evidence for God’s existence.

It is the miracle of the Holy Shroud which pushes the evidence to a “beyond a reasonable doubt” level that requires only very nominal amount of faith. Without the scientific evidence authenticating the Shroud, our understanding of history, philosophy and science provides compelling evidence for God’s existence, but a larger amount of faith is required.

In order to try and negate the important identifying characteristic of the bloodstains that indicate that the image of the man on the Shroud had a crown of thorns on his head, David tried to point out that history was replete with other “failed messiahs” from Jesus’ period of time. David, however, didn’t mention a single “failed messiah” that was crucified. David mentioned that Barabbas was about to be crucified [...] As such, we have no reason to think Barabbas could have been the person who was wrapped in the Shroud.

David, also, mentioned that he was providing a link to some other failed messiahs of that time who were crucified and possibly mocked with a crown of thorns, however none of these links to “failed messiahs” turned up any that had been crucified.

As such, and among other things, the bloodstains that evidence a crown of thorns on the image of the crucified man on the Shroud still point very strongly, if not exclusively, to Jesus. This doesn’t even get into the issues of the other miraculous, unexplainable features of the Shroud — like, among other things, how the body image was formed, and how the blood stains were put on the linen cloth in anatomically correct spots to match Jesus’ wounds prior to the image being on the cloth.

David then brings up the Bible story in Matthew with the saints who were raised from the dead [presumably, as he mentions, shrugging off their burial shrouds] upon Jesus’ death. David tries to argue that any one of these resurrected saints could have been the man who had been wrapped in the Shroud of Turin. This, however, isn’t very convincing as we have no evidence that any of these saints had been crucified or that any of these saints had been accused of being a “false messiah” to where if they had been crucified, the Roman soldiers would have mocked them with a crown of thorns.

If resurrection, alone, could account for the special image on the Shroud, then it is curious that the other “thrown off” shrouds of these saints were not, also, preserved like the Shroud of Turin. Everything still points to the Shroud of Turin being Jesus.’
Carrot and Stick

As to what, precisely, Hell is in the Bible, I stated in the podcast that I can’t really be certain, but that it might very well be what the traditional view depicts Hell as. It might not. It would be foolish, however, to assume that the fiery description of Hell is hyperbole, because it might not be. I try to hope for the best while expecting the worst. Regardless, we have been warned, and we have been given a choice. The cost of the free-will that we have is that we can choose to go against God and be apart from God. God will not force us into Heaven against our will.

One of the most popular indictments against God by atheists is that He is a “moral monster.” While David didn’t use those words in his opinion piece for this podcast, he goes on to say the following: “If god were only offering the carrot, then I might be okay with the scheme, maybe. But as long as any part of the deal is emotional terrorism [Hell], I can’t accept the god of the Bible as a good person. And if he is not good, then he is not god.”

It seems like an awfully risky proposition to assume that one’s own definition of “good” is the same as God’s. Moreover, we shouldn’t forget that God’s goodness is counterbalanced by, among other things, His being just.

As for David’s being “bewildered” and “disturbed” by my traditional view of Hell with a possible twist, I’m not so sure what the big fuss is about. All I’m saying is that we do not know God’s specific plans for us for all of eternity, we do not know if He might show mercy to people in Hell at some point. I wouldn’t bank on it, but He’s God. He can exercise His mercy if He wants to and if He thinks it’s just. We just don’t know.

A drowning man cannot rightfully accuse someone of letting him drown if that person is holding out a lifesaver for him.

We’ve all been warned, and we have all been given a choice. We get to exercise our free will and live with what we choose. What we do with that choice is on us.

-Teddi Pappas