



Unbelievable?: Why after ten years of talking with atheists, I'm still a Christian

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No one likes to be told they are wrong; but is that any reason not to listen? Seeking to burst the 'Christian bubble' that many believers find comfort in, Justin Brierley began to invite atheists, sceptics and non-believers onto Premier Christian Radio to unpack and understand the so-called 'unbelievables' of the Christian faith.

Now, over ten years later, Premier's Unbelievable? podcast continues to captivate hundreds of thousands of listeners and has even spawned its own annual conference. But how has ten years in the atheist-argument-firing-line affected the presenter's faith?

Taking the best from conversations with Richard Dawkins and many more, Unbelievable? the book, will invite readers to look behind the scenes at how ten years of talking with atheists, sceptics and non-believers has stirred, shaken but ultimately strengthened Justin's own belief in the not-so-unbelievable Christian faith.

Suggested contents:

Bursting the Christian bubble

God: The best explanation for human existence

God: The best explanation for human value

God: The best explanation for human purpose

When the internet tells you Jesus didn't exist

A few facts that only fit the resurrection

Making sense of suffering

What about the other religions?

My 5 minutes with Richard Dawkins

Faith: Choosing to live in the Christian story of reality

Unbelievable?: Why after ten years of talking with atheists, I'm still a Christian Details

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From Reader Review Unbelievable?: Why after ten years of talking with atheists, I'm still a Christian for online ebook

Jacob O'connor says

My church has a disproportionate amount of talented preachers. As good as they are, I've noticed a trend. The better I like them, the longer I've known them, the more I trust them - the better their sermons get. The more I care about them, the more I care what they say.

I feel the same way about Justin Brierley. I've been listening to his "Unbelievable" podcast for a few years. He's a warm, likable guy, and I appreciate how fair he is to his guests. Even the ones with whom he disagrees. Brierley is always the moderator, so I was intrigued when he wrote a book defending his own Christian convictions. Unbelievable the book makes good. It's a good introductory apologetic for faith. I recommend the book, but I especially recommend the podcast.

Notes:

1. Evolution contradicts thermodynamics. Things don't go from less to more ordered (34)
2. Atheists subtly assume morality when they argue against it. (62)

Daniel Rodger says

This is a really well written, insightful and easy read. It's the sort of book a Christian or skeptic would enjoy because Justin engages with the types of questions people actually ask which makes it worthwhile, irrespective of your current standpoint.

Some of the reading highlights were listening to Justin retell highlights from some of the debates he has overseen over the years, some of which I've since listened to since.

This would be one of my top-5 books to give to a skeptical friend as it engages with a wide variety of topics. Hopefully, this won't be the last book Justin writes!

Pick up a copy for yourself.

Tim says

This is a skilfully written book that makes the case for Christianity with great clarity, Brierley's skills no doubt honed by his years hosting debates between believers and atheists. It left me, a convinced Humanist, totally unmoved, but it's an important read for my fellow non-believers to help them understand where Christians are coming from, and why an obviously intelligent guy believes what we see as total rubbish. One clear conclusion that can be drawn is that it is nigh on impossible to argue a convinced Christian out of their

belief, but nevertheless all Humanists and atheists need to understand and be able to counter the points made in the book.

Michael Brady says

Justin Brierly, host of Premier Christian Radio's "Unbelievable?" in the UK, has just written a book titled "Unbelievable?: Why after ten years of talking with atheists, I'm still a Christian." It's quite good, though it contains little we haven't heard on the radio program (or the podcast). So of course me and some of the other non-believers who hang out at the "Unbelievable?" forum are having a crack at a "Justin Response Book" in a manner inverse to the Christian response to Bart Ehrmann's "How Jesus Became God: Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher From Galilee." First, I had to read the book. Now comes the writing...

Tommy Grooms says

I've listened to the Unbelievable? podcast for a few years, so I was excited to read Justin Brierley's book. At its core it is an apologetics book making the case for Christianity, but what sets it apart is Brierley's unique experience fielding hundreds of conversations between believers and nonbelievers making the best arguments for and against the faith. Brierley uses his experience to make his arguments with the fairness and respect that is characteristic of how he moderates the show.

Sarah says

What a brilliant book. Justin managed to broach so many topics while maintaining a warm, personable, intelligent, understandable and thought-provoking style. Some people may say that it's all been said before in the radio show but I am a regular listener and he managed to succinctly explain many things in clever new ways. It was a joy to read and I will be recommending this to my Christian and non-Christian friends alike.

Alex says

I found "Unbelievable?" by Justin Brierley an easy and approachable read. He begins with a chapter on his own faith journey and the origins of the Unbelievable? radio show. He then covers many of the major arguments for Christianity such as the argument from design, the argument from morality (including an interview with Richard Dawkins), and the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. He tackles the thorny issue of suffering with sensitivity. I think he is on the money in his closing chapter when he challenges the reader to experience Christianity as a lived reality rather than treat it as a philosophical exercise.

I appreciated Justin's brief response to counterarguments in each section, although for someone seeking more 'meat' it may be a little light. For regular listeners to the podcast or those familiar with the arguments, the book won't contain anything new. That's not necessarily a bad thing. 'There is nothing new under the sun' and it's not designed to be a heavy philosophical tome, it's Justin's explanation of why he's still convinced by the arguments for Christianity. Justin is a radio host, not an apologist per se, so the subtitle is very apt, "Why after ten years of talking with atheists, I'm still a Christian".

As someone who has been constantly confronted by very good arguments for and against both faith and skepticism for over a decade, I think he brings something unique to the table and speaks into the issues with a rare authority. The book is eminently approachable and would make a great introduction for anyone exploring whether Christianity is true, whether Christian or non-Christian.

Taylor Rollo says

This might be my new favorite book to introduce Christians to apologetics. Brierley provides a winsome, charitable, and helpful argument for Christianity. I have a couple of issues with the book, which I will get to, but those, in my opinion, do not impugn the overall helpfulness of this book.

The book begins with an appeal for charitable and civil conversations between atheists and Christians, and he is not simply knocking the angry atheists but challenging angry Christians as well. In fact, he says over and over again that most atheist he encountered on his radio program have been willing to listen when given a fair hearing as well. I think the first chapter about better conversations is one everyone needs to consider.

Next, he takes what I think is the most helpful approach to apologetics with atheists/naturalists. He takes what I like to call (my name, not his, so if you do not like it, do not get on to Brierley) a worldview-exchange approach to apologetics. This is something I teach often in my context with students and church congregants: naturalists will not consider Christianity until a) they are showing that the worldview of naturalism does not fit reality and b) they are given a compelling vision of how the Christian worldview (story!) does.

This is what Brierley does in a few stages. First, he argues for the explanatory power of the Christian worldview and the inadequacy of the naturalist worldview with three chapters, each representing a central part of our reality that needs explanation: human existence, human value, human purpose (or meaning). In my experience with atheists/naturalists, this is the best route to take when trying to commend Christianity and these are the three places I think we need to target as well, giving a compelling view of the Christian worldview (story). If I could update this section, I would only add one more chapter to it: human consciousness. I think that Thomas Nagel has done a good job critiquing naturalism on this point in his book "Mind and Cosmos" and then the Christian apologist simply needs to show how the God of Christianity endowing humans with consciousness is a better explanation of our reality.

Then, Brierley goes directly next to the place we must go in all apologetics: Who is Jesus? That is the crucial question of Christianity, and Brierley makes this clear. All evangelism and apologetics must not get sidetracked by "red haring" arguments but must always bring it back to Jesus and His centrality. If one can convince a naturalist that theism is the best worldview to explain reality, then that only gets them to deism, until we make the argument for Jesus as the Son of God and His resurrection. Brierley does this in two very helpful chapters: one that answer the question "Who was Jesus?" and the other that looks at the evidence for His resurrection.

Again, I think that is the best route to take when trying to commend Christianity to an atheist. We do not need to get caught up in finer points of doctrine like the Bible's view of homosexuality, creation, hard passages in the OT, etc. Those are important topics, but people can have errant views on them and still be a Christian. However, a person cannot be a naturalist and a Christian. A person cannot think Jesus is "just a good teacher" and be a Christian. We need to target those areas, pray that the Spirit will work in their hearts, and then if they become a Christian, let the Spirit work out the rest from there.

Where Brierley goes next is into atheistic objections. This is where the book has some issues.

His chapter on the problem of evil is a good idea, but his answer is not guided by Scripture, which is ironic since he says that sometimes when answering this question people argue for the God of philosophy; not the Bible. That is exactly what he does. The beginning of the chapter is helpful because he points out that everyone has to deal with this question, not just Christians. The atheist has to show why we can even ask the question, that is, why there is a universal definition of good that makes the question of evil and suffering even intelligible, which atheism cannot do.

Yet, his answer to this is what some call a "free-will defense" of God. It is not surprising given his obvious indebtedness to William Lane Craig. I have great respect for Craig, but his arminian views takes him away from being biblical as well and in this direction. Basically, Brierley (and Craig) in wanting to show why an all powerful and good God would allow evil and suffering, take the route of sacrificing God's sovereignty and basically say that God's not actually in control of all things. This defense is a) not helpful for who can really trust or find hope in a God who is at least partially impotent when it comes to evil (either by will or by lack of power, Brierley does not explain which) and b) it is not biblical. Brierley does not really cite any Scripture but just assumes that God is not sovereign over this universe in every thing, even though this is the teaching of the Bible (e.g. Eph. 1:11). He does mention Calvinism (the Reformed tradition that understands God's sovereignty in all things) but simply dismisses it as something some people do not like. Again, this is ironic because Brierley says that some Christians defend a God of philosophy but not the biblical God, yet that is exactly what he does here, since the idea of a God that does not control all things is a humanist god; not the God of the Bible.

However, this chapter being what it is, it is still helpful in the first section of it, and, again, it does not really detract, in my opinion, from the overall value of this book. If you want more helpful arguments for the problem of evil, I would recommend Stand to Reason's many helpful articles about it: <https://www.str.org/search/problem%20...>

He has a chapter about "atheist memes," which is generally very helpful and good. The only problem here is that he tries to deal with the problem of hell through annihilationism: the view that hell is not eternal punishment. He says it is more biblical, but he does not defend this statement. He also says it has a growing list of adherents, but he does not defend this one either. I believe he is wrong here and there are better ways to talk about hell and judgment. Yet, again, this is a minor flaw on an otherwise excellent book.

His final chapter on living in the Christian story is helpful, especially when it notes the difference between having the right ideas and really trusting Christ. He also points out that we can make good apologetic arguments and even win in arguments, but if we do not commend Christ to people, we are not really doing the work of apologetics.

Overall, I really, really recommend this book. Even if you disagree with me about the two flaws and agree with Brierley, I will not be incredibly concerned, for you can still be a valuable tool in the hands of God for the cause of Christianity, as Justin Brierley is. He has given us a fantastic book for apologetics, for it uses the method of targeting worldview and then taking people to Jesus, which I think is the best way to commend Christianity to a lost world.

L.I.T. Tarassenko says

Good book. Not arguing much that is particularly new, however the author acknowledges that.

What makes it more interesting is his years of experience moderating debates on his radio show/podcast between atheists and Christians, where he has had some some high-profile and/or heavyweight speakers on.

Examples include Dawkins, Arif Ahmed, Bart Erhman, Derren Brown, Laurence Krauss (atheists); John Lennox, Alister McGrath, Gary Habermas, Andy Bannister, NT Wright (Christians) and more.

This means that he is able to draw on lots of dialogues between these different thinkers, rather than just their own single point-of-view texts, which makes for compelling reading.

It's also concise and elegantly written. I still think it misses out some things though (see my review of Tim Keller's 'The Reason for God').

Rejoy Thadathil says

I've been a huge fan of the unbelievable? Podcast hosted by the author Justin Brierly and it was only obvious not to skip this book. The first few chapters was more a mix of older apologetics books such as More Than a Carpenter (Josh McDowell), Seeking Islam, Finding Jesus (Nabeel Qureshi), and Case for Christ (Lee Strobel). I loved reading the chapters where Justin takes on some of his guests he interviewed and defends as to what he thinks is right. I especially enjoyed his mention on Richard Dawkins. I never thought Justin to be funny but this book changed my opinion. It is just amazing to know that his faith in the Lord only grew stronger despite moderating or debating with high profile humanists.

My faith grew stronger in the Lord and I must thank him for that. What I enjoyed in this book was his take on some of very complicated matters such as heaven and hell and his view on that.

This book is indeed a new flavor of what apologetics is and how one should disagree with humanists lovingly and yet not get perturbed in Christian ideologies.

P.s - English is my 2nd language.

Msimone says

Brierly recounts the debates concerning the existence of God and the belief in Christianity issues in his dialectic conversations with atheists, sceptics and agnostics whom he has interviewed over the years on his weekly podcast series "unbelievable."

This book is readable to the non-Christian, but more so to the Christian. Its interest for me rests in the author's énumération of the apologiste such as Stephen Law and Richard Dawkins, whose books are widely read by non-believers, and whose views support a purely materialistic view of our universe, and dispute God as the best explanation of human value .

The author describes apologetics through measured rational argument that does not alicante the reader with bombait. The book describes arguments aime to dicount the historical veracity of the existence of Christ and of his ressurection. Further, the author responds to the atheist argument that a just, loving god would not allow suffering in the world with discussion about how there is a relationship of suffering to free will and the expérience of evil and suffering is a means for humans become closer to God.

A Christian reading this book is already familiar with the author's arguments and would be strengthened by them, the sceptic would be influenced to read more of the Christian apologists such as C.S. Lewis, and the atheist would not be persuaded, yet might be influenced to reflect further on his own beliefs.

Matthew Taylor says

The book is a pleasant, but disappointing read.

I am an avid listener to Justin's Unbelievable podcast and I was very keen to read his story and his account of the the first ten years of the show.

In his opening chapter he encourages good dialogue between those with and without faith. A position I wholeheartedly agree with. It's why I listen to his show and why his show is the only religious show I make the effort to listen to.

Unfortunately that's the only good thing I can say about the book. Justin maybe have spent ten years talking with atheists, but I fear he hasn't spent enough of those years listening to them. His book includes subjects which have been covered on his show and the criticisms that atheists have voiced in response have not been addressed. Justin repeats the same lines unaltered.

Examples include:

That Dice Video! - panned by astrophysicists, but still held up as though it made a valid point, it doesn't.

The agnostic / atheist conflation - to be atheist is to be not a theist, it does not mean believing there is no god. Agnostic is not gnostic, which is a knowledge position, not a belief position.

The discussion on objective moral values is riddled with subjective phrasing, which is amusingly ironic really.

John Jaksich says

A well-written book by Justin Brierley that details his conversations with noted Atheists. Reading the book gave me clarity regarding what it means to be Christian, scientist, and writer. It wholly recommend the book. I believe the book is needed for many us who spend our days reading and writing science --and who also wonder what it means to connect with those who no longer accept religion. We are not in the minority.

Rod says

I just met this guy at the Apologetics Canada Conference March 2018. Gotta love funny British guys.

My wife knew who he was -- I've never heard of him. Apparently he has a successful radio show and podcast offering called "Unbelievable?". I've now listened to about 10 episodes: they are nice and somewhat frustratingly entertaining. So I bought his book.

The book is a somewhat short undertaking of his life and radio ministry. A good introduction is all.

This guy is no theological giant or academic know-it-all, he's not even a Billy Graham or even slightly like the Pope. But he is an excellent moderator for debates with Atheists, Wiccans, Charismatics, New Age Crystal polishing Sophies, and a few Cult nutters. He's the guy who wonderfully keeps the conversations flowing and reasonable.

Here in the book he does a bit more than that - he shares what he thinks on numerous issues. Yes, he has an opinion and he's definitely a Bible believing Christian.

But he's just too nice. Is that a crime? Heck no. He's British after all. But so was 007 James Bond: and he let the bad guys have it.

I don't have the book currently with me for examples and quotes (maybe later). But its lightly filled with examples of what keeps Justin a Christian. Indeed, he's observed arguments with the best the non-christian world has to offer intellectually --- and it's just not good enough to rip away his Jesus. You tried - you failed! He explains why: wonderfully and simply.

I doubt this book will change many peoples minds. But it's worth a read.

Nick says

Having been a semi-regular listener to the Unbelievable? podcast down the years, it was great to hear Justin's journey to bringing the show through to fruition, which he details in the opening chapter.

The majority of the rest of the book summarises the best arguments for and against the existence of God, as well as the best arguments for and against the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and Justin does a wonderful job at summarising them with necessary brevity (to keep the book short) but also in some depth.

I particularly enjoyed the last chapter, where Justin moves the conversation on from head to heart.

As those who have listened to the Unbelievable? show will know, Justin is an excellent broadcaster. He also writes very well indeed. Bravo, Justin.
