

Friday, August 12, 2011

Five Years and Still Waiting...

Five years ago, on August 11, 2006, Aaron Kinney over at [Kill the Afterlife](#) posted [this blog entry](#) in which he published a prayer request on my behalf.

In his post, Aaron wrote:

This post is a prayer request for all theists and afterlife believers to give Dawson Bethrick 20/20 vision! Whether a Christian, Muslim, Satanist, Hindu, or whatever other superstition you believe in, you are cordially invited to pray to, converse with, bargain with, sell your soul to, or by any other means necessary get your invisible sky fairy to magically grant Dawson Bethrick the 20/20 vision that he is so patiently requesting.

Don't let the derogatory references to your deity fool you; I am dead serious here. This is the perfect opportunity to win a convert for your religion of choice! Dawson Bethrick has stated that he is even willing to close his eyes and bow his head to increase the prayer's effectiveness. It's a small price to pay for 20/20 vision! All you need to do as the messenger of God is to set up an appointment with Dawson, and he will surely give the head bow and eyelid shutter at the requested moment.

And if Dawson's vision really does change to 20/20 because of your religious intervention, I have a good hunch that he will convert to your religion. I know I will! You hear that, theists? If Dawson Bethrick confirms with me that his vision has been miraculously enhanced to 20/20 because of your prayer or other negotiation with your God, then I, Aaron Kinney, will convert to your religion on the spot.

This is a grand opportunity for theists everywhere! Convert two extremely atheistic souls, and destroy two atheist blogs with one successful prayer request! It's a fucking bargain. Our souls are for sale at discount, theists. Can you cough up the spiritual dough?

Five years later, and I am in fact more dependent on corrective lenses than before. How can this be?

Now of course, some Christians might dismiss this prayer request by saying "God doesn't do parlor tricks." And yet, it's not clear what exactly a "parlor trick" is understood in this context to be, while Aaron's prayer request is not for the Lord to do anything different from what the gospel narratives in the New Testament already depict him doing, namely curing vision problems. Aaron certainly has not asked that the Christian pray that Jesus do something that's arguably frivolous, like turning water into wine (if that's not a parlor trick, what is?), but that Jesus do what he's said to have done in passages such as Matthew 9:27-31, 20:30-34, Mark 8:22-26, 10:46-52, Luke 7:21, and John 9:1-41.

Sensing the futility of this move, some Christians might retort by saying that such passages are not meant to indicate cures of physical blindness, but rather "spiritual blindness." But if Christians think I'm "spiritually blind" on account of the fact that I reject Christianity, then it seems again that these passages have relevance which the Christian could not deny, and that again we have yet another opportunity to find out how effective prayer is and how reliable the Christian god's promises are.

Let's put it this way: critics of Christianity are not going to be impressed by the apologists' ingenuity in creating *excuses* for their religious doctrines not coming to pass. And yet, excuses are all that apologists seem capable of producing.

Now one Christian did comment in response to Aaron's blog, and stated, "Dawson, I have been praying for you." When I inquired on this, and pointed out that my eyesight still had not been restored to 20/20 vision, the same Christian responded, "I said 'I am praying for you' but I didn't tell you what I am praying." This kind of response strikes me as simply childish, when in fact the Christians expect us to take their worldview's doctrines of miracles and divine promises seriously.

If a Christian truly believes that his god has the power to restore my vision to 20/20 acuity, and actually believes that prayer has any efficacy, why would he hesitate or be reluctant to pray for my eyesight?

Some Christians might respond, as many I've known have, that my lack of faith prevents their god from working in my life. This only suggests that their god is a very weak god, so much so that it is rendered effectually powerless by a mere human being's lack of faith. This doesn't even seem biblical. The book of Acts depicts Saul of Tarsus as militantly opposed to Christianity, to the point of conducting aggressive campaigns against its followers. Clearly he could not be said to have had faith in Jesus at this point. And yet, his lack of faith did not prevent Jesus from working in his life, according to the holy storybook.

Besides, shouldn't the believer's faith be enough? After all, John 14:14 puts the following promise into Jesus' mouth:

If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

This is an unequivocal promise which Christians believe Jesus uttered. Are we supposed to simply ignore such things? Should we be surprised that apologists themselves do not introduce this and similar passages when trying to defend their god-belief? I'm not. They're an embarrassing failure. But if a non-Christian bring them to the apologist's attention, don't be surprised if the apologist tries to make the non-Christian appear foolish or ignorant (or both) for doing so. While these verses are in fact in the bible and we're expected to accept everything the bible says as "God's word," the apologist will try to show that the problem is with you when you remind him of their presence in "Scripture."

Meanwhile, my eyesight continues to decay, which suggests either that believers who are aware of the prayer request that Aaron publicized are reluctant for some reason to pray for my eyes to be restored, or their god really doesn't exist, or both. I can't help but suspect that believers don't want to pray on my behalf because they don't want to give their god a chance to fail.

But what do I know?

by Dawson Bethrick

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