

Our Awesome God
Sermon for February 2018

In the reading from Genesis this morning, God calls Abram out of his country, and to go to a country He will show him. Out of that God will bless him and make him a great nation.

Psalms 86, that was read, praises God, and that all nations, the Lord has made, will come and worship before Him and glorify His name. God called Abraham, as we heard in Genesis, so that his family would become the vehicle of bringing this knowledge to the rest of the world - that they would worship the God of Creation.

In the reading from Revelation, the apostle John sees in heaven the fulfillment of the New Testament - a countless multiple from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages rescued from wrath through the blood of the Lamb.

In the Gospel reading from Matthew, the resurrected Lord, Jesus, calls upon his followers to make disciples of all nations by the preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom.

This being World Mission Sunday it seems appropriate to point out, that as God called Abraham, so He calls all of us, through the Great Commission, in different ways to spread the Gospel in our lives, our vocations, our hobbies, in everything we do. We are all missionaries whether at home or in a distant country.

Last month I talked about the Second Person of the Trinity; this month I'd like to talk about the First Person; God, the Father, as He is the underlying reason for all missions.

God is both knowable and incomprehensible. He has revealed himself in creation and in Scripture; and in the Person of Jesus. And while He has revealed much about Himself, there remains much we will not know. Books that deal with this subject talk about those attributes that only He possesses; that He does not share with us such as eternity, unchangeableness, and omnipresence (that He is everywhere), and those attributes that He does share with us; such as love, knowledge, and mercy. (Bible Doctrine; Grudem; p. 70)

These two categories of attributes, of those He shares and those He doesn't, however, can be misleading. While we do share some of the same attributes with God, He possesses them in a different manner. For instance, wisdom is an attribute we both share, but God possesses it in an infinite manner and we do not. Ours is significantly limited; and such is true of all the attributes we share with God.

In looking through the index of Grudem's book; "Bible Doctrine," I found a long list of subjects that address the character of God, only a few of which are: beauty, glory, goodness, faithfulness, grace, holiness, invisibility, and two sometimes we'd like to forget: jealousy and justice.

One of the most significant attributes of God, that only He possesses, is His complete independence. He existed before time, before creation, and exists of His own necessity; completely independent from creation.

In the words of Wayne Grudem, (P.72) "God's being is...something totally unique. It is not that God does not need the creation for anything; it is that God could not need the creation for anything. The difference between the creature and the Creator is an immensely vast difference...The difference between God's being and ours is more than the difference between the sun and a candle, more than the difference between the ocean and a raindrop, more than the difference between the arctic ice cap and a snowflake;

God's being is qualitatively different. No limitation or imperfection in creation should be projected on to our thought of God. He is the Creator; all else is creaturely. All else can pass away in an instant; he necessarily exists forever.

That God is completely independent and does "not need us, or any part of creation in order to exist, or for any other reason, is reflected in the words of Paul in his address to the Athenians; "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He himself gives to all men life and breath and everything." (Acts 17:24-25) (Bible Doctrine, p. 71-72)

An article in the English Standard Study Bible (p. 2754) also reminds us that - "We are finite creatures and can only understand within that limitation while God is infinite; without limitations in every quality He possesses. Further there is a perfect unity of God's attributes that is far beyond human experience. And last God has chosen not to reveal some things."

In this regard here are some words from the Bible; words from God:

From Psalm 145:3 - "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable."

From Job 26:14 - "Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?"

From Isaiah 55:8-9 - "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

From Romans, Job, Isaiah, 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy - "Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"

And these words from Deuteronomy 29:29 - "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever..."

When I read over these verses I am reminded of the words of a Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." While God has adopted us as sons and daughters we must never lose our sense of awe and wonder of His greatness, his power; his holiness, His majesty. He is the Source, the foundation of all that is. Nothing is apart from Him; not life, knowledge, consciousness, the order of the cosmos; nothing. All of our approach to life is depended on our understanding of this reality.

In 1952 Mortimer Adler, an American philosopher, educator, editor, a late comer to Christ, was the chief compiler and editor of the Great Books of the Western World. They comprise some 50 volumes of the world's greatest books. The first two books are an index of themes of the remaining 50 books authored by names such as Calvin, Luther, Plato, Socrates so that if someone wanted to know what Augustin said on Law, the index with its theme outlining what Augustine said on the subject, would point the inquirer to that author's complete writings in the remaining books.

The longest reference in those first two books is on God pointing to writings, after writing, in the remaining books on what the various great western authors said about God. Years ago Mortimer Adler was being interviewed by Larry King and Mr. King asked him why the longest reference is on God?

Great themes;- history, law, ethics, knowledge all of this but God is the longest reference in you provided. Can you tell me why? Mortimer Adler, without hesitation, said Larry, it is very simple, there are more consequences for your life that follow from that one issue than any other. Adler said that what you believe or disbelieve about God has everything about how you live, why you live, how you orchestra your life, what your values are.

Ravi Zacharias, the Christian apologist, said that Adler made an undeniable point - more consequence follow from this one issue than any other issue you can image. He says that is why another great writer (G. J. Chesterton) put it in these words: There is only one angle at which you can stand straight and multiple angles at which you can fall.

Charles, Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, in answer to the question; Who is God, in a commentary on the book of Malachi, put it this way - The proper study of the church is the Godhead, it is the highest science, the loftiest speculation, and the mightiest philosophy which can engage the attention of a child of God; and that is the name, the nature, the person, the doings of the existence of this great God.

It is a subject so vast that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity, so deep that our pride is drowned in its infinity, other subjects we can comprehend and grapple with - in them we feel a kind of self contentment, and go on away with the thought "Behold I am wise" but when we come to this master science, finding that our plumb line can not sound its depth, that our eagle eye can not see its sight, we turn away with the thought "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing."

How proud our culture is on how much we know and how much we have accomplished. but still the most basic questions remain unanswered. What is life? At a person's death we say that he has passed away; but what has passed? I'm not asking about what we observe. I'm asking what is it?

Janie B Cheancy of World Magazine writes: "We know how life proceeds and how it ends, how growth occurs, how strength declines, how breath departs and bodies decay. But we don't know what life is, and we can't identify the one force that holds its billions of particles and processes together. Actually, the depth of what we don't know is staggering. All our advances of the last 6,000 years have only scratched the surface...the mystery of life eludes us."

To that I add what is consciousness; what is its nature? How is it that we have understanding? What about gravity; what exactly is it? I don't mean what does it do; or how is it calculated, but what is it? We have words to describe the most basic things we observe, and yet they remain mystifying as to their nature.

But God has not kept their Source unknown to us; we are not left completely in the dark. Here are a few verses from the Bible.

In regard to life - From Job 33:4 - "The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

In regard to consciousness - Also from Job 32:8 - But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty that makes him understand."

In regard to gravity - From Colossians 1:15-17 - "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

Ravi Zacharias, who I mentioned before, said that the more one studies the being of God, the more one gets to know Him, the more one realizes how little is known. He says that God is the perpetually novelty that brings you enchantment, which is never exhausted, because this is a thing of the soul.”

Towards the end of a December I was listening to a podcast in which Mr. Zacharias tells of a conference he was invited to attend at Yale University. As it happened one of the members of the Board of Trustees was given seat next to one of Ravi’s colleagues. At some point Ravi overheard the Board member, who was amazed that the conference hall was full, this being a Thursday evening, ask Ravi’s colleague why he thought the conference was overflowing, given that this was a lecture on God on a Thursday evening. Ravi heard his colleagues respond, Might it be, that they are here because you have left their souls empty?

All our knowledge, all our learning, all our study ultimately leaves us empty unless we understand its foundation. And that foundation is the answer to the most basic questions asked by philosophers, and sages through the centuries: What is our origin? Why are we here? Is there an ultimate Source of right and wrong or is it just personal preference? What is our destiny?

It is true that we have made great advances in knowledge. What is a shame is that the secular world uses those achievements to point to themselves; while those who look deeper; those that have a greater depth of field, as I wrote in the February Joyous New, can see the hand of God in everything we uncover about our reality.

In that regard, I want to close with the words of Janie B. Cheancy taken from a December World News Group podcast. While there is portions of her talk that I did not fully understand, but when I listened to the conclusion of what she was saying, I was in awe; in wonder of what she revealed about our awesome God and His creation. Ferd no doubt will appreciate all of what she said, but for most of us stay tuned to the end. I hope then, you will feel as I did. For those who remain completely confused, Ferd will be available at coffee hour for explanation. Here are Janie B. Cheancy’s words:

“I’ve... been thinking of the days of creation, and what was actually taking place under the stately rollout of light, seas, sky, and land. On Day Four, with a “Let there be,” the heavenly bodies appear “for signs and seasons, days and years.” This was not the creation of light, for light was the radiant energy, from which God created everything else. Nor time, for time began “In the beginning.” But by setting out planets and stars, God provided the raw material for numbers, measurement, calculation, science—and music.

The “music of the spheres” is more than poetic imagery. Pythagoras, ca. 500 B.C., may have guessed it first. Leader of a cult of mystics on the island of Samos, Pythagoras taught that numbers were the purest form of knowledge and the key to reality. He wasn’t entirely wrong. The scientific revolution, which occurred roughly 2,000 years later, took great strides forward in mathematics. But even more intriguing, at least for numerically challenged people like me, were Pythagoras’ experiments with music.

Imagine two musical strings of equal length. If one is cut to half the length of the other, it will vibrate twice as fast, a ratio of 2-to-1. The two pitches produced are seven full tones apart—an octave. To hear it, hum the first two notes of “Over the Rainbow”. A third string, cut to one-third the length of the original, results in a pitch that vibrates at two-thirds the speed, or a ratio of 3-to-2. Musicians call it a major fifth, and it sounds like the jump between the second and third notes of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” A fourth string cut to one-fourth the length of the original vibrates at a ratio of 4-to-3—a major fourth, like the first three notes of “Taps.”

The fourth, the fifth, and the octave are common intervals, in all cultures, and all musical traditions. For Pythagoras, their mathematical relationship was a clue that the same relationships occurred in the

heavens. He pictured the planets “ascending” from Earth at distinct intervals corresponding to musical pitches. That was why music fed both soul and body; it was part of the stuff we’re made from.

Fast-forward to ca. 1610, when the brilliant astronomer Johannes Kepler was formulating his “laws” proving that planets moved in elliptical orbits, as opposed to the concentric ones, proposed by Copernicus. While observing the variations in speed between when a planet is closest to the sun and when it is furthest away, he made an interesting discovery. Saturn traveled at 135 degrees per solar day when closest to the sun and 106 degrees when furthest from the sun a ratio of 135-to-106. After factoring out these numbers, the ratio differs by only two seconds from 5-to-4—the interval, in musical terms, of a major third.

Kepler went on to measure and factor the velocity ratios of all the planets, and discovered that they closely corresponded to musical intervals. When he compared the ratios for combined pairs of planets, such as Jupiter’s when closest to the sun, with Mars,’ when furthest from the sun, he found the intervals of a complete chromatic scale; that is, a 12-tone scale, as if playing the black notes as well as the white notes on a piano keyboard.

As the planets rolled along their elliptical paths, shifting speed and velocity, they described recognizable patterns, even harmonic chords. “Henceforth,” Kepler wrote, “it is no longer a harmony made for the benefit of our planet, but the song which the cosmos sings to its LORD and center.”

Modern science, while it doesn’t come to the same theological conclusion, still regards Kepler’s measurements to be “frighteningly good,” as noted astronomer Fred Hoyle observed. An eerie coincidence, perhaps—or the recurring melody of “It is good,..”

LET US Pray - Lord God how awesome are You and the creation You have brought into being. You are the foundation, the ground, of our being and our purpose in life. The more we learn the more we are in awe and when we fail to glorify You even the heavens make up for our failings. May it be this day, and all the days that follow, that in our lives, and everything we do, we bring glory to Your Name.

Amen