

Fearless: Fear That God is Not Real Sunday, 6/6/21

Last week we confronted the terror we sometimes experience when we wonder if the end of this life is truly the end of the road. The eyewitness accounts of the resurrection of Jesus tells us otherwise, as do the powerful words of Scripture and the testimony of the Church. We are destined for a resurrection life in eternity.

This week, we look at two related fears that are kissing cousins to our fear of death: That God either isn't real or is off watching us from a distance as a casual observer, no longer present and intervening in the lives of ordinary people.

Most of us worshipping today accept that the world and stars around us, and even time itself, were created by God. We can accept the biblical teaching of Genesis, that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,"¹ even if we can't all know or agree on exactly how or when this creation came to be. In this basic belief in God as our creator, we separate ourselves from atheists, who claim there is no God who designed the cosmos. Carl Sagan, once a celebrated atheist himself, is quoted as saying, "The evidence, so far at least, does not require a Designer. Maybe there is one hiding, maddeningly unwilling to be revealed."² Atheism is a cousin to humanism, where all the hope we have for today and tomorrow is invested in human effort and potential. We are, of course, made in God's image, and so there certainly is quite a bit of human potential in this world. But as Christians, we believe that none of it amounts to anything apart from our divine Creator, our redeemer Jesus, and the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit.

I believe that this world does reveal the unmistakable fingerprints of a designer. Take the nautilus shell, for example. As the nautilus grows, its chambers get larger and larger. The volume of each consecutive chamber follows a predictable mathematical relationship- The kind of predictability that suggests the nautilus is no accidental biological mutation. No, the nautilus definitely had a creator, and Christians assert that creator is God.

In our first Bible reading from Romans, Paul makes the case that even before we had the Scriptures, the incarnation of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or the Church, the existence of God

¹ Genesis 1:1. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

² <https://quotefancy.com/quote/783366/Carl-Sagan-The-evidence-so-far-at-least-and-laws-of-Nature-aside-does-not-require-a>

was evident in all of creation. “Eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being.”³ But as Paul notes, we have to “take a long and thoughtful look at what God has created.”⁴ Have you done that recently? Have you allowed yourself to meditate on the awesome power of God that’s reflected in an ocean wave? Have you considered the wonder of the workings of the human eye, or the mystery of how we can commune with God through prayer?

The case for Intelligent design really isn’t that hard to make. Take any discipline like botany, biology, or physics, and you’ll find a remarkable order and complexity that clearly decries the possibility of random and spontaneous self-creation. There are just too many experiences in this life, from giving birth to dying, where the hand and Spirit of God are all too clear to ignore. But I suggest that it’s not the fear that God doesn’t really exist that most of us fear. Rather, it’s the fear that God created the cosmos and then sat back to watch it all happen on its own. The twenty-five-dollar theological word for that is “deism.”

What’s a deist? One person describes deism as, “Believing in God, but not the associated baggage.”⁵ You might be a deist if you believe in God as the intelligent designer of the universe but don’t accept the creeds of any particular religion; You believe that God stepped away from the universe after creating it; You believe that God’s Word is the universe, not holy books; You think God can best be found outside of a church building; You believe you can best achieve spirituality on your own; You are morally guided by ethics and conscience apart from any Scriptures; and you don’t believe God intervenes in the natural order through supernatural means.

The most famous image of God put forward by deists is that of the clockmaker who, after designing and building his clock, winds it up and then walks away, leaving the clock to unwind in the way it was designed to do. The pendulum swings and the gears turn, all without the immediate involvement or concern of the clockmaker. It’s a starkly different image from that of the Good Shepherd, who leads and protects the flock. Prayer to a God like this seems rather pointless, like talking to an empty chair.

³ Romans 1:20. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <https://www.deism.com/whydeismkettner.htm>

Unless you've been stranded on a deserted island for the last 30 years, you've heard Bette Midler sing "From a distance." It's a bit unfair, actually, for me to pick on Bette in this way, as the author of the lyrics is actually Julie Gold. Bette sings, "God is watching us, from a distance." It's a beautiful song, but when I hear that chorus I think of a man hiding in the woods with a pair of binoculars, secretly taking surveillance notes and marking down all my bad behaviors. Is God really watching us from a distance? That's just creepy! And it's really not very comforting at all. Bette Midler may not be a deist, but those lyrics certainly suggest a deistic theme. Fortunately, our Gospels describe a God who is not absent but is completely present, fully experiencing the world as both God and human. Luke tells the familiar story this way, starting in chapter 2, verse 1, in the New Living Translation. [{Read Luke 2:1-12 NLT}](#)

Jesus has many names, but do you remember the one given to him by the prophet Isaiah? "[T]he Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us')." ⁶ If you're afraid that God isn't real, or that God is too distracted or disinterested to care about you, then you need to remember that God is Immanuel, God with us, all the time, and not just for Christmas.

The words of the angel Gabriel still apply to us today. "Don't be afraid! I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!" ⁷

Is God taking an extra-long lunch break after those busy six days of creation, too busy to notice what's become of us on earth? Is God floating on a cloud somewhere playing solitaire on a laptop? Just the opposite! God became so intensely preoccupied with creation that God decided to be born into creation to become its shepherd and savior. And when Jesus left earth to return to the Father, he sent his Holy Spirit, to ensure that God remains present with us, even more intimately present than before, living in each of our hearts.

Times of doubt are a normal experience for any Christian, but some find themselves so doubtful that they're actually opposed to the reality of Christ. Max Lucado tells the story

⁶ Isaiah 7:14. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

⁷ Luke 2:10-11. Ibid.

of C.S. Lewis, who was an ardent atheist during his early years at Oxford.⁸ Lewis summarized his position poetically, in a sentiment that might be familiar, or at least relatable, to you: “Had God designed the world, it would not be; A world so frail and faulty as we see.”⁹ What changed his mind? Some University faculty friends, J.R.R. Tolkien among them, convinced him to actually read the Bible, after which he had prolonged conversations with them and eventually experienced a stirring of his heart. Lucado writes of this time, “Could it be this simple? Could the chasm between doubt and faith be spanned with Scripture and fellowship? Find out for yourself.”¹⁰

God is real, and God believes in you, even if you don’t believe in God. God is not absent, but present, faithful in the promise of the Messiah, the Son of David who came to forgive the sins of the world. God is the Christmas child, born not in a distant palace, but close by in the ordinary. God is the man who lived a life of healing, ministering hands-on to the blind and the lame, preaching to the hurting and lost. The same God came to Hagar in the desert, to whom she said, “You are the God who sees me.”¹¹ God is the man on the cross, who gave his life, once for all. God is the Son who was raised from death and left the tomb empty, showing us our own hope for resurrection. And God is the Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus to dwell within us and among us, counseling and guiding us, giving us the inner witness of assurance of our salvation. God may be invisible, but God is anything but absent from our lives.

Are you doubting today? God is there for you. Read your Bible. Talk with Christian friends. Persevere in faith and prayer, and if you can, praise God for the providence he’s given you, even in the midst of your doubt. There will come a day of deliverance. Jesus promised that, when He said, “Ask and it will be given to you; a seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”¹²

Please take some time now to reflect on the reasons you believe God is real and present.

⁸ Max Lucado. *Fearless: Imagine Your Life Without Fear*, pp 145-147. Thomas Nelson (2009).

⁹ Ibid, p. 145.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 146-147.

¹¹ Genesis 16:13. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

¹² Matthew 7:7. Ibid.



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