

Introduction

Let me add my welcome to the ones you have already received; it is jolly good to see you all here, including out of towners here for tomorrow's game, new students, and other visitors. Let me introduce myself to you by telling you that my name is David Kingston, and I teach and do research in organic chemistry at Virginia Tech, and I am also one of the elders here at BCF. I am however perhaps better known here as the "bow tie guy" thanks to my wonderful wife who makes them for me.

Our sermon series this Fall is on the theme "in the Beginning; the Gospel in Genesis", and our message today is on "The God who speaks".

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There are many religions in the world that seek to claim our attention, from the major world religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, to a cargo cult in the village of Yaohnanen in Vanuatu, which considers Prince Philip of England as their god.

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Most of these religions claim to have some sort of revelation from God, although the revelation is often lost in the worship of idols

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Or of other gods

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So how do we know which of these revelations to listen to? How can we know unless God speaks to us in some way? So how does God speak to us? And how do we listen correctly to the true God and His words? It is absolutely crucial to our faith that *God is there, and He is not silent*, as the Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer famously said 50 years ago. To answer these questions we turn, as always, to our authoritative source, the Bible. And by the way, if you don't believe the Bible is God's word, please don't tune me out just yet. Hang with me and keep an open mind, and let's see where we end up.

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Gen 1:1-5

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning — the first day.

6 And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water...and it was so.

9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so.

And so on, in verses 14, 20, 24, 26, 29, we have the refrain "God said" and something happened, until we reach the end of the chapter, when we read:

Gen 1:31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day.

Bible-believing Christians may and do disagree on the time period and details covered by these verses, and it is not my purpose today to get into a discussion of this. But what all Christians do agree on is the key truth recorded in verse 1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and in the truth that in some way this creation came about because of God's word. "And God said" is inevitably followed by the words "and it

was so” or their equivalent. And so the word of God is directly related to the creation of God. Or to put it another way:

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1. God speaks to us through His creation.

So how does He do this, and what do we learn from God’s creation?

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*a. The first thing we learn from our passage is the **power of God’s word in creating the universe and our world.***

We are reminded from these verses that God holds the key to one of the fundamental questions of life, which is “where did I come from?” This is one of the key questions of philosophy; why is there something rather than nothing? I can remember thinking about this as a boy in England, probably when I was 12 or so years old. Why is there something rather than nothing? Why are there trees and animals, why are there mountains and rivers, why are there Hokies and Buckeyes and not just an empty void? How did it all begin? Why is there something rather than nothing? And when you think about this for a few seconds, you realize that there are only two possible fundamental answers. Either God was there, and everything flowed from Him and His power, or there was nothing there, and everything we know today; trees and animals and mountains and rivers and Hokies and Buckeyes and the sun and moon and planets and stars, all somehow appeared out of nothing. You can decide for yourself which is the more reasonable answer! But I conclude that all that we have in the universe flows from God’s creative power; it was His words that hung the stars in space, His power that created our world, and His power that formed you and me. A gifted pastor once said, "God stepped from behind the curtain of nowhere and stood upon the platform on nothing and spoke a world into existence." As David writes in Psalm 19

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Ps 19:1-6

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

*b. The next thing we learn from our passage is the **wisdom of God’s word in creating the universe and our world.***

Our world is an amazing place that was created by God in just the exact way needed for everything to hold together and for life to exist. The laws of physics and chemistry were constructed so precisely that even small variations would make it impossible for the world to exist. I could give many examples of this, but let me just mention three:

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a. The Strong Nuclear Force

In particle physics, the strong nuclear force holds quarks and gluons together to form protons, neutrons and other particles. It is one of the four fundamental interactions, along with gravitation, the electromagnetic force and the weak interaction.

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If the strong nuclear force were just 5% weaker, no elements other than hydrogen could exist: our Periodic Table would have consisted of one element – hydrogen! Chemistry lectures would be very simple, but then I would not be around to give them and you would not be here to listen to them!

If it were only 2% stronger, all the hydrogen in the universe would be gone by now, converted into helium and heavier elements. Without hydrogen, no water, no life.

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b. Electromagnetism

If another fundamental force, electromagnetism, were just a little stronger, electrons would be so tightly bound to atoms that chemical bonding would be impossible. A little weaker, and molecules would disintegrate at room temperature.

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c. The Properties of Water

Almost all liquids contract when they freeze. Alone among common liquids, water actually contracts until gets down to 4 °C, and it then expands as it freezes. This means that ice is less dense than water, and thus floats on water. If this were not the case, ice would sink to the bottom of lakes, and the whole lake would then freeze in cold weather, killing any fish or other animals in it.

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c. This leads to the question “how do you respond to God’s word in creation?”

This world we live in, with its mountains and rivers, its deserts and its swamps, its planets and its stars, is a part of God’s word to us. It is a marvelous demonstration of His power and His wisdom. As Paul puts it in his letter to the Romans:

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Rom 1:20 Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

How do you respond? If you are not yet a believer, you have two options;

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You can be like the English atheist Bertrand Russell, after he wrote his book, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, somebody asked him, "If you die and you find yourself before God what would you say?" And Russell, very pompously, said, "I would say, 'Sir, you did not give me enough evidence.'"

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Or you can be like Anthony Flew, a prominent English atheist who became convinced of the evidenced for the existence of God and in 2007 coauthored the book “*There Is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind.*” Which option will you choose?

If you are already a believer, let me suggest two applications of God’s message to us in creation.

The first is that God’s creation reminds us of His power and His wisdom. As you look at the trees and rivers, as you look at the stars at night, remind yourself that they are God’s creation; praise Him for His creative power, and thank Him for His beautiful creation. As Alfred Joyce Kilmer wrote

I THINK that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

But a second lesson is that since this is God's good world, we need to do our part in keeping it unpolluted and clean for the next generation. We must not worship the earth – that would be idolatry – but we can respect it and care for it as best we can because it is part of God's creation. This means at the very least that we do not trash it up, and we do not needlessly waste natural resources such as oil and water.

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2. God speaks to us through His word.

The second way God speaks to us is through His word, the Bible. The world God made is His word for all the world to see, while the written Bible is His word for those who will read it. The Bible is God's inspired word, as Paul explained in his second letter to Timothy:

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2 Tim 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

And these two ways in which God speaks to us are combined in the Psalm we have already begun to look at; Psalm 19.

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Ps 19:7-11

7 The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

8 The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

9 The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.

The ordinances of the LORD are sure
and altogether righteous.

10 They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the comb.

11 By them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

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From these verses we learn that God's word, described here as His law or precepts or commands or ordinances, is for our good. It is here where we learn about the heart and mind of God. And it is here that we learn not only what God has done in creation, but also what He has taught.

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a. God's word revives our souls. The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.

Have you had a rough week, and are feeling discouraged and depressed? Then listen to God's word as our Lord says

Matt 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

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b. God's word is reliable. "The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple."

Our Lord repeatedly quoted the Old Testament while he was on earth; the phrase "it is written" occurs 25 times in the gospels. In John 10:34-36 he is recorded as follows in a discussion with the Jews

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came — and the Scripture cannot be broken — what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?"

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c. God's word is for our protection.

v. 11 By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

God's words warns us of danger, just like a warning sign at a level crossing

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The 10 commandments, for example, were given to us for our protection and our blessing. Through them God is saying "this is the way to live a life in accordance with the way I made you; this is the way to of peace and blessing"

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God's word brings blessings:

The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.... They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.

God's word is much more than this, but we need to move on to our final thought. Before we do so, let me make one observation. We began this study together by asking "how do we know which of these revelations to listen to? How does God speak to us? And how do we listen correctly to the true God and His words?" Up to now almost everything I have said could have been said by a Jew, and much of what I have said could also have been said by a follower of Islam. But our next truth is one that is unique to Christianity, and that sets it clearly apart from Judaism and Islam. And very simply it is the truth that

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3. God speaks most clearly through His son Jesus Christ.

As many of you know, we have just finished a sermon series on the Letter to the Hebrews, and this great book opens with these memorable words:

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Heb 1:1-3

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

And as Chris reminded us last week, Jesus Christ is God's word to us

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John 1:1-4, 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

So God's Son Jesus Christ is God's last word to us; He is God's word in the flesh. And to top this off, Paul tells us in Colossians 1 that Jesus is God's image and all things were created by Him.

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Col 1:15-23

The Son...is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

So Jesus Christ is God's word to us; God speaks most clearly through him. He is the exact image of the invisible God, He was in the beginning with God; he is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, and in Him all things hold together.

And what is God saying to us through Jesus? Many things indeed, but one stands out clearly: God loves you and me and the whole world

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John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

What a great God and Saviour we have!

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4. God speaks through His Holy Spirit

When Jesus was giving His last teaching to his disciples before going to the cross, He told them about the Holy Spirit.

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John 16:13-14 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

It is the Holy Spirit who takes God's truth in creation, God's words in Scripture, God's salvation through His Son, and puts it all together in our hearts. The Holy Spirit's work is most often to take a teaching from the Bible and apply it to our heart. So when you read the Bible and a verse seems to jump out of the page at you, that is the Holy Spirit at work in your life.

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5. God is speaking: are you listening?

We have looked today at how God speaks to us. He speaks to us:

Through His creation

Through His Word

Through His Son

Through His Spirit

The question for us to consider is, are we listening? And in particular, are we listening to God as He reveals His truth through His Spirit in His creation and in His word and in His Son? Let me illustrate some ways that God speaks to us.

Maybe you are driving too fast on I-81 and a car with flashing blue lights pulls behind you and you pull over and a State trooper gets out and starts to talk to you. Do you ignore him when he starts to ask you for your license? Of course not; you listen carefully and do what he asks and you hope he is feeling in a good mood and will let you off with a warning. Sometimes God speaks to you like a state trooper; you are doing something wrong and He pulls you over and warns you from Scripture or perhaps the inner conviction of the Holy Spirit that you will be in trouble unless you stop and listen and obey.

Or maybe you are married and your husband or your wife asks you to do something, or you have a close friend and he or she asks you to do something. Do you listen to these requests? Of course you do, because you love the person making the request. So it is when God speaks to us through His word or through his creation or through His Son or through his Spirit; we respond out of love for the one who loved us to death.

Or maybe you get a call from the Gates Foundation to tell you that they like your work so much that they are going to give you \$5,000,000 for your research. You listen very carefully to this call! And God speaks words of blessing to us from His word; do we listen?

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Let's go back to that level crossing sign:

Stop: Stop trying to discover God by your own thoughts and fancies and feelings.

Look: Look at what God has revealed in His creation.

Listen: Listen to what God tells us in His word.

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Heb 4:7 "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."