

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

God the Creator

Presented by Harry Goodhew

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most defining and fundamental assertion of the Bible is that God is the Creator of all that is. You and I live in his creation.

Genesis opens with the majestic words, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The Psalms repeat the theme: “The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof”. Paul makes the same claim before his cultured audience in Athens: “The God who made the world and all things in it ... He is Lord of heaven and earth ... He ... gives to all *people* life and breath and all things;”

The great Creeds of the Christian Church affirm that, “We believe in God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth”.

Now, Genesis’ claim that God is the Creator is regularly the focus for debates about God’s existence, but this morning that’s not my interest. Rather, I want to think with you, not about apologetics – reasoning for the existence of God - but about ethics - about living, about what it might mean for our daily lives to say, “This is God’s world. He made it”

SEGMENT 1

The opening words of the Bible assure me that the universe in which you and I find ourselves is not a chaos. It’s a creation - God’s creation. However confusing I may find life to be, however chaotic history may appear - my own or that of the planet on which I live – I can know that this universe is a work of God’s hand, it has meaning, it has beauty and dignity, and it has purpose.

Back in the 1960s a well-known sociologist wrote a little book with the fascinating title “A Rumour of Angels”. Professor Berger argued that it is possible to see in the life of human beings what he called “signals of transcendence”. He meant, certain repeated “acts and experiences” that seem to give expression to elements that are essential to what it means to be human: “acts and experiences” that occur within what we would call ‘natural’ reality but which appear to point to something beyond that reality.

To make clear what he meant by one such “signals” he offered the example of a mother whose child wakes in the dark, disturbed, fearful, and agitated. Typically a mother would say “Don’t be afraid – everything is in order, everything is alright” and hush the child to sleep. This response he argues is in the end deceitful and untrue unless “there is some truth in the religious interpretation of human existence”. Why, because if the ‘natural’ is the only reality there is, the mother is lying to the child. The universe will finally swallow up both mother and child. This assurance on the mother’s part is, he says, to “be translated into a statement of cosmic scope – ‘Have trust in being’, trust in what is. Child psychologists, he said, consider such trust as being “absolutely essential to the process of becoming a human person”.

It is the revelation in Scripture that God is the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists that enables us to have a basic trust in reality, to have a sense of ease and ‘at home-ness’ in our universe. It is as Maltbie Babcock’s old hymn put it:

This is my Father’s world, and to my listening ears
 All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.
 This is my Father’s world: I rest me in the thought
 Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
 His hand the wonders wrought.

Or as a modern cosmologist has expressed it: “We are truly meant to be here”

SEGMENT 2

As comforting and affirming as it is to know that what is comes from the hand of God, it certainly raises questions. One is the question of suffering; the question that perhaps more than any other causes people to doubt the existence of God or, if he does exist, to have any confidence in either his goodness or his power.

Because of our encounter with Jesus we have good reasons for believing God is almighty, good and trustworthy. Yet the issue of pain and suffering remains as a challenge in a world created and upheld by a good and loving God. So what do we say? There are some important bits of God’s revelation that throw light on the subject.

First, we recognise that suffering comes either because of human actions or because of what we might call ‘natural’ causes: things like earthquakes, floods and cancers. In so doing we are bound to note that God has endowed both humanity and the ‘natural’ order with certain freedoms. God has endowed us with the capacity to make choices. It is part of what it is to be human. The choices we make can be bad and thus cause harm and suffering. With regard to natural evil, disasters etc., John Polkinghorne, who was at one time Cambridge Professor of Mathematical Physics, wrote about the cosmos as being “given the opportunity to be itself” – “a world of orderliness but not of clockwork regularity ... endowed with an assurance of development but with a certain openness to its actual form”. He writes: “God no more expressly wills the growth of a cancer than he expressly wills the act of a murderer, but he allows both to happen. He is not the puppetmaster of either men or matter”. So within the range of God’s absolute sovereignty men and things have the capacity to act according to the nature God has assigned to them. That God-given freedom shapes the environment in which suffering can occur.

In addition there is the Bible’s description of the world as being under the dominion of sin and death. It is not only that which God so loved that he gave his only Son for its redemption, it is that which Jesus said hated him and would hate his disciples also. It is a world says John that “lies in the power of the evil one”.

Our present world stands somewhere between what it was, and what it will be. We experience creation in that half-light condition. It is a world in need of redemption. Paul describes it as a creation subjected to futility, in slavery to corruption, groaning in the agonies of labour as it awaits its redemption. That is how we experience it at the present time: something yet to be brought to its appointed future.

SEGMENT 3

Thinking of God as the Creator and Sustainer of everything and of creation’s need for redemption and re-making brings us to the Bible’s most breath-taking revelation. God the Creator is in fact the Crucified God.

The Word that was with God in the beginning and, who was God, became human – became flesh and blood. As flesh and blood he died on the cross. “He who was in very nature God’ took upon himself “the very nature of a servant, and being found in appearance as a man ... became obedient to death – even death on a cross”. Taking this assertion seriously leads us out of the area of our creaturely understanding into the realm of the mystery that is God. By saying that God is a mystery we are saying that there is a vast ocean of difference between the Creator who is original and his creation which is derived. We can never know God as he is in himself we can only know what he reveals to us of himself. As we look at Jesus on the cross we see something astonishing: God so loving this sin and death shrouded world and its denizens that, in a way that is finally incomprehensible to us, he comes himself in the person of Jesus and dies for us. Charles Wesley’s hymn catches this sense of wonder:

‘Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!
 Who can explore his strange design?
 In vain the first-born seraph tries
 To sound the depths of love divine!
 ‘Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
 Let angel minds inquire no more.

In the history of Jesus we see what this death for sin means. It means resurrection and life. When we acknowledge who Jesus is and take him as our Lord and Saviour we are touched by that life-giving power of resurrection. We become new creatures, new creation, alive from the dead, and eager anticipators of the final act of God’s resurrection, renewal, and transformational strategy – his new heavens and new earth.

These ideas are easily recited but taken seriously they are the most joy-inspiring prospects that we can contemplate. Each day we can celebrate that we live in a world that is the creation of our heavenly Father. When we experience the brokenness and death-stained character of daily life in the form of tragedy, suffering, human tensions, and natural disasters we can look towards the day when this will be different. When we become conscious of our own brokenness we can look to the resurrection grace of God to enable us to do better in our daily journey towards spiritual maturity.

CONCLUSION

Given what we have briefly considered this morning we can say: “With God on our side who can be against us? ... Nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, being threatened or attacked ... These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us. For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

God bless and keep you.