

## 2CH Sunday at 7.30

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Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

### The hand of God

Presented by Harry Goodhew

#### INTRODUCTION

I'm a city boy - born and bred. But some 40 years ago I went and did a stint in the outback as a bush padre. That was quite a shift – being translated from the order and close settlement of suburban life to which I had always been accustomed, out to the long treeless miles of the Nullabor Plains.

I did return to work in the city when I finished my term 'in the outback' but I've never forgotten some of the lessons, impressions, and experiences gained from those days. One in particular sticks in my memory and I would love to share it with you in the few moments we have together this morning

#### I

I have an abiding memory of the first night I spent out alone on the Nullabor - that vast expanse of our unique Australian landscape. The sky was clear. No humanly generated lights detracted from the pristine brilliance of the stars that studded the night. The heavens were literally "aglow with beauty". It was awe inspiring – breath taking. It left me speechless – Yes, I was alone, so there was no one else with whom to converse: but in truth it was far too beautiful for words - it was there simply to be admired.

Perhaps you have had a similar experience or experiences? If you have, may I ask you "What did the experience do for you?"

It did a couple of things for me. First, it recalled for me the words of the old Hebrew Psalmist: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge." (Psalm 19:1-2 - NRSV)

I know that not everyone sees it that way but for those who do, it says something absolutely wonderful about God; about his power, his immensity, and his love of beauty, of diversity and of splendour. An ancient lady of the church once said that all that exists, lies in the hand of God as a nut might lie on our open palm.

We know that beyond those visible stars lies a veritable ocean of galaxies and systems that together dwarf our solar system into virtual non-existence. The heavens teach me that God is not like us – he is not simply some super-man; he is unimaginably greater and more powerful than anything of which our minds can conceive. Far too often, we reduce God to our dimensions of thought and, in so doing, either lose the comfort and encouragement of trusting him, or escape the dread involved in seeking to ignore or resist Him.

There are a couple of other thoughts those starry heaven generate in my mind. I would like to share them with you after this music.

## II

This vast theatre in the sky that we observe has been the subject of thought, of poetry and dreams, and of debate from time immemorial, and, as well, across many different cultures. Where someone like the Psalmist saw the heavens as declaring the glory and handwork of God, others see it as the chance product of blind and unintelligent processes. That they are there, and that we are impressed and moved by the sight of them, is ultimately something without any real significance – it simply happens.

What is significant to me is the number of eminent scientists who are now talking about our universe as being ‘fine-tuned’. Here’s an example:

*... the remarkable picture that is gradually emerging from modern physics and cosmology is one of a universe whose fundamental forces are amazingly, intricately and delicately balanced or ‘fine-tuned’ in order for the universe to be able to sustain life.*

Or as Professor Paul Davies expressed it in the closing sentence of his book *The Mind of God*, “We are truly meant to be here”. This is breathtaking is it not; equally as amazing as the beauty of the night sky?

The writer of Psalm 19 did not have the sophisticated tools or the nigh on 3,000 years of research that we possess but he had two things which guided his artistic talent and worshipful spirit. The first was that he could see, feel, and think. The other was that he was in possession of something important that came to him by another route. He could allow his unfettered emotions to lead him to sing, and he could find confidence in the fact that he possessed a revelation that came from the heart of that universe whose power and beauty he extolled.

Here are his words from the same Psalm: “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; (Psalm 19:7 - NRSV)

I have another reaction stirred by the vastness of that universe, a small portion of which we see as we look to the heavens and I would like to talk about it before we conclude today. So I will be back in a moment

## III

Do you want to feel small and insignificant? Perhaps not, but just think of this. It is thought that there might be hundreds of million of galaxies in the universe. Our Milky Way Galaxy, in which our solar system is one such system among many, is one of those multiplied millions of galaxies. A light year is the measurement used in astronomy for measuring distances. A Light Year is the distance that light travels in a year. It is calculated as a distance of a little less than 10 trillion kilometres per year. Now with that in mind appreciated that it is thought that it would take something like 100,000+ of those 10 trillion kilometre units just to cross our one galaxy.

My head is left spinning at this point and I am left with a question. The question is this: “Can I really think that I, being such a tiny creature in so vast and almost unimaginably huge universe, have any meaning or significance whatsoever?” If there is a God can he really be interested in me and in the small details of my life?

Well, a very clever Frenchman, years ago, wisely noted that “It is not from space that I must seek my dignity, but from the ordering of my thought ... by space the universe encompasses and swallows me up like a mere speck; by thought I comprehend the universe.”

There is a dignity and uniqueness bestowed upon you and me, that the Bible says flows from the will and purpose of our Creator. We never earned or deserved that dignity, indeed we appear to do all we can to repudiate it, but the Bible says God keeps seeking after us and calling us back to himself.

So, if the beauty of the stars tells us a story about the power and majesty of God, the magnitude of the universe in which we live is not meant to crush us, it is meant to be a further encouragement to have confidence in the One who created us and who sent his Son into the world to die for us. Indeed, we are encouraged to cast our cares upon this magnificent Creator and Redeemer because we are told “he cares for us”.

In a moment let me come back and tell you about something on my desk.

### **Conclusion**

There is a stand on my desk on which is a piece of purple cardboard. It has one very large carpenter’s nail prominently attached to it. It’s the thing that first catches your eye. On the purple cardboard, and around the nail, are these words: “See, I will not forget you. I have written you on the palm of my hand.”

Do think about that. God bless.