

## *A Covenanting God'*

Sunday 14 June 2009 – Rev Lance Thomas

Genesis 6:9-14, Genesis 6:22 – 7:1, Genesis 9:8-17

Meaningless, meaningless', says the teacher, 'Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless'.

These are the words of King Solomon written a very long time ago. But of all people in the Bible Solomon is the one who fits neatly into the model of a 21<sup>st</sup> century success story. He has more wealth than a Spanish football player. He has more fame than a Hollywood movie star with a string of Oscars under his belt. He has more women than the lead singer of any rock and roll band. He has more political clout than any United States president and he will be remembered in history long after any current living person has been forgotten.

Solomon has got it all, yet it means nothing. Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless. He's not just saying here that these things mean nothing. He is saying his life is meaningless, worthless, of no value.

Solomon shares one other thing with most of the successful people of our 21<sup>st</sup> century world and many of the not so successful as well. At this point in his life Solomon does not know God. He may have known God at one point in his life, he will again, but not at this point.

Last week we began a series of messages on Knowing God. The central conclusion from last week's efforts is all we can know of God is what God makes known of himself. But also God makes much known of himself, through his Word, the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and Person of Jesus Christ. As we look, of course very briefly, at some of the things God makes known of himself, I want us to try and see how what we know of God's self revelation has immediate impact on the 21<sup>st</sup> century world we live in.

God's revelation begins with a statement; 'In the beginning, God'. Out of nothing, God created everything. There was nothing prior to God, it is not God and ... It is only God.

Secondly God is not part of creation, he is outside of it. The scriptures support nothing of the idea God and creation being one and the same.

The understanding of creation is actually vitally important to how we live today. How we understand our world today. So, as Jesus said, verily, verily I say unto you ... or in other words, listen carefully this is important!

If the universe, if the world we live in was created by a person, it was created for a purpose.

If it somehow came into existence from nothing and nowhere, by an accident of atoms, which came from I don't know where, it has no purpose, it just is.

If the universe was created by a person it was created for a purpose. If it wasn't created it has no purpose.

Another important statement. The value of anything is related to its connected-ness to the ultimate purpose.

Let me try and give an example. I am a typical male collector of stuff in my workshop. I have used ice cream containers of nuts and bolts I have acquired over the years, In themselves they have no value. I am not a fisherman so they are not even useful as sinkers. When I am doing a job and I need a particular size bolt and I find one in my box, it is almost priceless, but then if I can find a nut that fits the bolt, it becomes hugely valuable because it meets the purpose I have in mind. Its even more valuable than the cost and time of going down town and buying one, because it has the added value of enabling me to say to Sandra, see that is not a load of junk, it's useful, it has a purpose.

One more thing. The Bible tells us not only was the universe created and created for a purpose, it was created with discoverable order and structure. We see that in the step by step format of the creation account. We see that also in places like the book of Job.

Remember a few weeks ago we looked at how Job describes the formation of life giving rain clouds. The sun draws moisture into the sky, clouds of this moisture are formed, the winds blow them into dry areas and they are released giving life. The purpose of the sun, moisture, clouds and winds is to give life.

I want to change direction again, then I will draw all this together.

Imagine the story of a woman and her daughter. The woman is 'faith', a particular faith, biblical faith, she is the belief in God as the creator, the order, the meaning, the purpose of life.

The daughter 'human inquiry'. She seeks to understand, discover, enjoy the order and structure of the creation. For thousands of years there is harmony between the two. In fact one is the daughter of the other. Faith encourages human enquiry, it believes in a God of order and encourages exploration of that order and the way it demonstrates more and more the wonder of the one who created it.

There comes a time however when the daughter decides she no longer needs the mother. She separates herself and in the ways of these sort of separations she becomes aggressive towards and dismissive of her mother. The mother continues to hope for a reconciliation and just lately there are some signs that the daughter may recognise she doesn't know everything and maybe the mother knows more than she has given credit to.

In this story the mother is the Christian/Jewish faith and the daughter the discipline of human enquiry which of course goes way back before what we now call science or more recently humanism.

The separation between faith and science began with Newton and the idea of natural laws which govern our universe. Although not realising it Newton's laws began the journey towards two types of truth. Facts which cannot comment on purpose, cause and effect. The law of evaporation and the law of gravity determine that moisture rises and falls. That in no way points to purpose. It just happens.

By the 1960s this division had developed to a world view that spoke of facts as being truth about the real world and any understanding of purpose and value developed from the facts as opinion only and certainly not to be considered or spoken of as truth.

Most of us have grown up with that influence, so it doesn't seem that strange to us. What we are unaware of is that if this is our basis for determining what is true about our world we cannot know if we live in a world that has purpose and in fact for most people, without any really serious thought, they live with the conclusion that there is nothing behind what is, it just is, therefore there is no purpose. While there is a discoverable order in the stuff that makes up the universe, it is not an order that speaks into values, meaning, morality.

The Biblical world view also champions order – it is the mother in my story. But it also places values on the order. It identifies a hierarchy of order. For example a human being has value significantly greater than a rock. Because in the created order of things the human being has a greater purpose than a rock.

A world view that says things just are cannot place a value higher or lower on what is. A rock is just an accident of atoms, how can one be more valuable than another. Neither have an intrinsic purpose. They just are.

Now of course people who have been influenced into a humanistic (there is no God) world view do have values. Many of the same values as believers. They would view very differently the throwing of children off a cliff as opposed to throwing rocks off a cliff. They will often be at the forefront of marches for peace or justice or human rights. They hold these values. But to do so, at the same time as saying, there is no purpose, the value I place on something is my arbitrary choice. Nothing has a purpose, it just has the value I want to give it.

Interestingly, the values held by most non believers are the same values believers hold, because they have been brought up in a world that for thousands of years has placed a high value on human life for example. A value that for all but a few decades of that time has been determined by the God given value of human life.

As one writer puts it, the humanist is living on borrowed capital. Their values come from one world view, while they expound another. Another writer has said the humanist stands with both feet firmly planted in mid air.

Solomon, the 21<sup>st</sup> century success story describes his life as meaningless. If the only meaning in life is the meaning he gives, then his conclusion and it is a sad conclusion, is that it is indeed meaningless. I call Solomon a 21<sup>st</sup> century man, not just because he acquired all the success many in the 21<sup>st</sup> century long for, but also because the God-less world view of the 21<sup>st</sup> century western world leads to the same meaningless conclusion.

By contrast, God's word to his world is that and what is, has been created by a person, therefore created for a purpose. Not only that but the creation has order, not just discoverable order of physical matter, but order of value within the purpose of creation. At the top of that order is humanity. Part of the created order, not separate from it as God is, but the most valuable part of that order. You are valuable because God values you. God values you because you fulfil an important purpose in the plan of creation.

What is the purpose that gives you such value?

You are created for a unique personal and eternal relationship with God. The truth is woven all through scripture.

I want to finish with just one example. Noah is described as a righteous man who walked with God. Not able to walk with God because he was righteous, but righteous because he walked with God. Noah seems to be unique in a world that did not walk with God. The earth was corrupt, full of violence and God had had enough. He causes the flood to come upon the world. I have no comment on whether the flood was a world wide or local phenomenon, it is what follows the flood that interests me. After the flood, God re-establishes humankind in a covenant with him. This is not a new covenant, it is a covenant that goes back to creation. It is the cementing of the relationship between God and the pinnacle of his creation, us. God says we remain at the heart of his purpose for creation.

What is a covenant? It is a promise, but it is a promise undergirded by the relationship that exists between those with whom the promise is made.

So for example, the strength of a wedding vow is not in the words used but in the strength of the relationship.

A covenant is made with God. The nature of God is such that he cannot go back on his word.

In covenant, God expresses his heart. He desires to be our God, for us to be his people. In a moment we will celebrate the expression of God's commitment to us in the person of Jesus Christ. 'This cup stands for a new covenant, a new relationship with God, made possible through the giving of my blood.'

God's expression of his 100% commitment to us at the time of Noah is symbolised in the sign of the rainbow. The rainbow, the effect of sun upon clouds and water, but so much more than that, a sign of a God who is apart from his creation, but whose goodness and love bridges the gap between himself and his creation.