

FAITH AND SCIENCE 2: CREATION AND EVOLUTION

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Text: Genesis 2: 1-4

Introduction: Let me begin by saying that you do not have to agree with me on my conclusions this morning. I am a pilgrim, a theologian who is trying to understand a complex issue in a constructive manner.

Recognizing our place in the world, the universe is an expression of communion with God. On the first Sunday of the month, here at First Baptists we celebrate communion. Communion is that expression of worship where through the symbols of broken bread and out-poured wine we are reminded of our fellowship with God. We are reminded that God loves us, that he has invested his son, Jesus of Nazareth, in our lives as He voluntarily sacrificed himself to give us life, to give us hope, to define the meaning of our lives. In this service we commune with God. And we also commune with each other, with our fellow believers. We are reminded of our need for one another, of our dependency on each other, of both our frailties and our gifts. We are reminded of the anticipation for fellowship in the future not only symbolically, but also by being in the presence of Christ Himself. Communion is something not to be taken lightly but to rejoice in and to commit ourselves anew to God and to one another through His church.

As I thought about communion Sunday I also thought about my last sermon on “faith and science.” I told you that I had more to say on the subject and that there would be a part 2. I thought that it would be quite a challenge to preach on “faith and science, the sequel,” and somehow make it segway into communion. But as I considered this task, I realized that maybe not, that perhaps there was a connection.

I. COMMUNION WITH GOD THROUGH SCIENCE: So I propose to you this morning that there is another expression of communion with God, and that is through His world and universe, through the nature that He has created, and through the processes within that world. How many times have you looked at the mountains, or a sunset, especially one on the mountains, at the beauty of the earth found in a fresh snow, a mountain stream, flowers and trees, the sight

of a newborn creature in the wild, and felt inspiration and expressed awe at the beauty, the order, the magnificence of this world in which we live?

And those of us who are believers, those of us who profess faith in the living God, and hope in the loving Son, we sense God's presence, we marvel at all that is around us. Like the symbols of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, this world symbolizes God's creativity and purpose, and in a real sense through the eyes of faith we commune with Him in nature, in our world, in our universe.

Like the writer of Genesis 1, as we were reminded anew, we can understand that this world, as we know it, perceive it, and continue to understand it, is the creation of God. And I call upon you to remember also, that the study of science enables us to continually understand this world, and this universe, and through faith we can affirm that God created it and that science tells us how He did it. If we look at God, and the world in this manner, then science is not an enemy of faith, rather it is a confirmer of faith.

For those who were not present last Sunday I preached about man's entry into space, the development of communications in terms of the radio all the way through up to the presence of HD television, and proclaimed that we will continue to expand our knowledge in not only these but other areas.

Any of us who have had surgery or advanced treatment for health issues realize how marvelous science is in providing the foundation for continuous advances in medicine. Without science some of us here today could have died long ago, or at least would have limitations on our lifestyle which would have made our existence so much less enjoyable. Some of you have had a variety of treatments for heart problems. I take a statin, which has reduced my cholesterol greatly and probably will extend my life. Some of you have experienced cancer in one form or another and have benefited from new discoveries and new treatments that enable you to overcome this terrible disease.

Some of you now have limbs which are not your own. You have a new hip, a new knee, a new lense in your eye (count me in) that has vastly improved your vision. We are expressions of the

Six Million Dollar Man in a lot of ways. And, in some cases, the new seems to better than the original when it was working.

So before you start attacking science, step back, take a good look, and be grateful. And through the eyes of faith you may well say, “Science has discovered how God made things, and figured out how we can use this order within our world and universe to make our lives better.” Science, from my perspective, is a wonderful way of discovering our communion with God. As we benefit from the work of the scientists, from the engineering and the technology that uses that science to make the machines and instruments, and products that either save or improve our lives, we can discover a new way of communing with our creator.

And yet, there are those believers, those Christians, might I even say those preachers who seem to rejoice in waging war against science. Science is godless, science is destructive of the faith, science is an enemy to be combated. I say to you in the most expressive theological and scientific vocabulary that I can pull forth from within my inner self – HOGWASH! BOLDERDASH! BUNK!

When properly understood in terms of the relationship between faith and science, the two combine to provide us with an expanded view of God, a healthy view of science, and a respect and appreciation for both. It’s time to call the war between faith and science what it really is – a charade that draws our attention away from critical issues like faith, and hope, like love and forgiveness, like genuine ethics and the breaking down of barriers that divide us instead of building walls that separate us. I call upon us to make peace with science, not continue to fight battles that limit our understanding of God rather than expand it.

II. Back to the Future: In Faith and Science 1 I shared my experience with freshmen students when teaching the Old Testament and Genesis 1: I pointed out that this was a terrible place to begin because some student always wanted to start right off with the battle between religion and science. The question I remind you was “Do you believe in

evolution?” The hidden agenda behind this question really was either you accept God, or you accept the godless, atheistic, approach of science.

So, I have decided to answer the question this morning honestly and openly. I remind you once more that I am a theologian, not a scientist. I begin by saying that you don't have to agree with me, just don't hang me. Try and understand that I am a pilgrim who is trying to find my way, a better way, to move beyond this war that some want to continue fighting.

Let me begin by responding to one of the tenants of the generals in the army of faith. Evolution is “just” a theory. All the answers are not presently known, some evidence is not available, and therefore evolution is “just” a theory with important missing evidence.

There is a major difference between scientific theories and our theories. I have a theory about how to interpret Revelation. I have a theory as to why people drive crazy on the interstate. I have a theory on political issues, religious matters, the meaning of life. And, so I throw out evidence from my experiences, my analyses, and my background (and my prejudices).

Scientists have theories which they seek evidence to prove or disprove. Along the way, many of their ideas and assumptions are confirmed, some are reputed. As advances are made, as understanding increases, as new experiments and ideas are tried, the base of the knowledge grows and grows. Scientists may not have all of the evidence. But many times they are able to make assumptions, draw conclusions, posit new ideas, even invent technologies or create medicines that treat problems based upon solid yet incomplete evidence. The scientist does not always have to have all of the evidence to in order to be confident in a scientific theory. That includes evolution.

Conclusion:

Let me go back to the question which my freshmen students often asked “Do you believe in evolution?” As I have stated I am not a scientist and I had not initially intended to discuss this. I even feared discussing it a little. Some people love the war and are looking to take prisoners. But as I was working on this sermon I decided to address the issue as best I can.

Here are some of my thoughts. If I had to say “yes” or “no,” despite my many limitations, I would say that based upon what I know, what I understand, that I believe that evolution is the best explanation of how life began in terms of a scientific view based upon available scientific evidence. And, *theologically* I believe that evolution is the way that God devised to create life, including human life. This is a statement of my faith, not a scientific proposition. I also realize that I could be wrong, that a new and better view could appear, and that if so, my faith in God would not waver. God would be the source of the new knowledge, the new theory.

When I consider evolution, or any other scientific issue, I think that maybe the example of putting together a jigsaw puzzle provides me with some perspective. Janis and I during the winter months will often decide to do a puzzle, usually one with 500, sometimes even a 1,000 pieces, every now and then one with 1,500 pieces. We start out with a picture on a box and a pile of small, strange looking pieces. We have an idea where we are going and how things will look when we finish. If we complete the puzzle and connect the pieces in the box, each of which contains small parts of the picture on the puzzle, then at the end of the effort, we will have confirmed what we have been trying to put together, and what we believe will be the final outcome. We will also validate what has been there all along, whether we ever complete the puzzle or not.

So, we try one piece after another, turning, studying, changing, evaluating color and shape, until finally we only have a few open areas to fill in. As we near completion, we have the certainty that what we have been doing is correct. Sometimes, if we have borrowed the puzzle or the factory has made a mistake, there are a few pieces missing. That is frustrating but at the same time, we are certain that what we have done up to that point is correct. A missing piece does not destroy the puzzle, it just is incomplete until finally all pieces are in place.

Science is the same way, and evolution is a good example. The scientific community has studied the evidence for years and years. They have tried some things that didn't work, like we try the pieces of a puzzle that we are certain will fit, and then find out that they don't. Science does not have all of the pieces of the puzzle when it comes to evolution, but it has put together a picture

that it has a lot of confidence in, and along the way it has tested a lot of the propositions to see what is valid and what it not. Some ideas have been rejected: others have been accepted because they do work. The more ideas that are proven, the closer the scientists are to finishing the puzzle. At the same time, until completion, the scientists can continue to move forward based upon what he or she does know and what it has proven.

The evolution puzzle is not complete. But it seems in the eyes of this novice that it is close to being finished. So what happens, if evolution is proven completely? Does that then prove that God does not exist? Some may say “yes,” including both theologians and scientists. I do not agree with either. I would say that the scientists have figured out “how” life came to be, but through the eyes of faith, I would conclude that the God of my faith chose to do things this way as a part of His orderly creation.

From the perspective of faith I now have an expanded view of God. Science has told me so much more about the universe, and through the eyes of faith, much more about the Creator than I could have ever imagined.

Whatever science discovers, my faith never wavers. Answering “how” tells me more about God, rather than disproving God. God cannot be put into a test tube and analyzed. If God could be proven or disproven, then God would not be God!

But we need not seek to battle science continuously in an attempt to protect the divine.

I believe in God –through faith. And I have confidence in science, based upon centuries of dedicated persons, who as “inquiring minds want to know!” Go ahead and fight your battles between faith and religion. As for me, and my house, we will love and appreciate both God and the scientists who provide the foundation for our very being and understanding.

Sometimes we celebrate communion with God through symbols, as expressed in the Lord's Supper. I encourage you also today to celebrate communion with God by departing from these

walls, looking west toward the mountains, and sensing and feeling His presence in their beauty and in our world.

Then start your cars, thanks to the scientists and engineers. Go home and take out a cold drink, turn on your tv, your air conditioner or your furnace, make a call on your phones, whatever you normally do. And thank God for this world, and thank the scientists who have helped us to understand it and to benefit from that understanding. And, oh yes, for some of us don't forget to take your prescriptions, and be glad!