

Has science buried God?

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[0 : 00] Well, I'm very pleased to welcome to Bon Accord this morning, Logan. Logan is part of the mission team that we've just been praying about.

This week will be Aberdeen University campus and different activities. And we're very pleased that he's able to join us for our service and share the word with us this morning. So welcome, Logan, and God bless.

Thank you. Well, thank you, David. It's been great to get to know you as well. I'm sure two lives would be not enough to get to know you. I love that.

Well, yes, as David said, my name is Logan. I work for an organization called Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, and I'm based with them in Canada. And as David said, I'm here this week as part of a team that's here partnering with the CU at Aberdeen University to put on a series of talks looking at the toughest questions people ask about life and faith.

We're looking at topics like, why is there suffering? Or is the Bible really fact? Or is it fiction? Or why isn't God more obvious?

[1 : 19] And these events are aimed at students, but perhaps you're here today, and maybe you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, but you find these topics interesting. You'd be more than welcome to come. You can come find me afterwards.

I have a schedule with me. I can show that to you. And this morning I'll be looking at one of these tough questions. Has science buried God? Has modern science made God irrelevant at best, if not impossible?

Can you take science seriously, but also believe that there is a God? This is a question that many of my atheist and agnostic friends have. It's a question I think many Christians have.

Perhaps it's a question that you have as well. I'll just say briefly by my background. My background in this area comes from really in high school.

I went to a science and technology high school. It sent a lot of people to top universities. Many of them now work for places like Google and Microsoft. So definitely was around science.

[2 : 22] I ended up leaving science to go to university and studying what I'll point out is called the queen of the sciences. Theology. But actually, funny enough, I've made my way back to science through studying at Oxford under John Lennox in an area which is called the philosophy of science.

Sort of going from the real more practical high school chemistry to sort of coming back to how does science work? How are we able to do it? What actually is the scientific enterprise?

And often, I find this is a great question to think about because I have so many friends who tell me, you know, Logan, it's just wonderful that you believe this stuff.

That God has given your life meaning. I can tell that it's done that. And I'm so happy for you. But you see, you know, I'm just a rational person. I just can't believe in God.

I believe in science. We just did a university mission at the University of Toronto. And there was a young woman there who had a very similar story. She said, I believed in God when I was little. I went to Sunday school.

[3 : 28] But when I started taking science classes in high school, I perceived that I needed to make a choice between science and what I'd grown up believing about God.

And she told me, and I chose science. I don't feel I could be honest otherwise. And this idea that there's a choice between science on the one hand and faith in the other is one that we see put forward often by big media figures.

We might think of people like Peter Atkins, a chemist at Oxford who boldly proclaimed a couple years ago, science and religion cannot be reconciled.

We might think of people like Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens who said similar things. But right away, I think there are at least two things that should make us say, hang on a minute. Perhaps that's a bit simplistic of a generalization to make.

I think the first thing I'd think about is the number of scientists today who still believe in God. There was a study done in the late 1990s where two scholars were looking at a few select scientific societies and looking at the proportion of people who believed in God into those who didn't.

[4 : 39] And to get a historical perspective, they looked at statistics from 1916, was the year they chose, and they compared that number to today. Proportion who believed then, proportion who believed now.

And contrary to what we might think, the percentage hasn't changed that much. In 1916, they found 42% of scientists in these elite societies believed in God.

In 1996, when the study was done, it was 40%. Not as drastic of a change as we might think. But the second reason why I think right away we should push just a hesitance to believe that science and faith are just opposed to each other, are when we look at the heroes of the scientific revolution from the 1500s to 1600s, the vast number of them who believed in God.

We would think about people like Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Boyle, Pascal, Faraday, Pasteur, Mendel. These are all people who believed in God.

And they had no issue reconciling that to their faith. I say all this just to suggest that this idea that the relationship between science and faith is one of conflict is perhaps too simplistic a notion.

[5 : 52] It's perhaps more complicated than we thought. It can't simply be said that all smart people are atheists, just as it can't be said that all smart people believe in God. And what I want to do this morning is look at this topic through the lens of a short passage of the Bible.

It comes from the book of John, one of the biographies of Jesus, and we just had it read to us. It's chapter 1, verses 1 to 5. And that perhaps you wouldn't call yourself a Christian and you're here and you would take issue with me, starting from the Bible, to talk about this topic.

But the reason I do this, I ask you to bear with me, is because I think often what can be behind this objection, science has proved God doesn't exist, is a misunderstanding of who God actually is.

The theologian N.T. Wright used to be a chaplain at a college in Cambridge, and he used to ask the incoming students who called themselves atheists, he would say to them, tell me about the God that you don't believe in.

Because chances are, I don't believe in that kind of a God either. You have to get clear, who is actually the God that Christians believe in? And I think this question, this passage gets straight to that question.

[6 : 58] Who is God? I think this passage says three things about God. It talks about him in terms of a creator, in terms of meaning, and in terms of hope. And I'll just be focusing on those three things this morning.

I'm just going to read the five verses again. If you have a Bible in front of you, that might be helpful to follow along with where I'll be going. But I'll be starting in verse 1. John chapter 1, verse 1. 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 light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. The first point I want to make is that these words describe a God who is a creator of all things.

Verse 1 echoes the very first words we find in the Bible. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And in this passage, we see the same idea underscored, God as creator. But we get a bit more of the window into how this actually happened.

[8 : 09] Because we're told about the Word. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, was with God, and the Word was God. We're told later that the Word became flesh.

And we realize that John is talking here about Jesus, who Christians believe was God who became flesh, who became a human being. What does the Word do in the passage? What's his role in creation?

Well, verse 3 tells us, all things were made through him, and without him a thing was made that was made. God is portrayed here as creator, like in Genesis 1. We're just told more of how this happens.

It happens through the Word. God creates through Jesus. But now you might say, all right, but what difference does it make that God is a creator, that he's the source of all things?

I think it makes a big difference, because often the objection goes like this. You know, Logan, a couple thousand years ago, people believed in God because they didn't know how to explain things. They didn't know any better.

[9 : 07] But now, with the advances of science, we don't need God to explain everything. He's superfluous. And what people have in mind is actually a conception that the Greeks had of God. Zeus was the thunder god.

He was the god that they believed in to explain thunder and lightning. But we find in John 1 something utterly different. We don't see, in the beginning, God created the bits of the universe we don't understand yet.

Instead, we see God created everything. Through him, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made. God created everything.

What does this mean? It means that the more science advances, the more we learn about the universe, in no sense is the God of the Bible being crowded out. Because what we have going on here are two levels of explanation, an explanation of mechanism and an explanation of agency. Let me explain what I mean by that. Let's say that you're a scientist and I have you over to my house one afternoon. When you arrive, you notice that a kettle is boiling. And I ask you, why is the water boiling in the kettle?

[10 : 13] Being a scientist, you give me a very thorough explanation. You say, well, the stove is a heat source. And the heat source is being conducted to the metal of the kettle. The atoms and molecules of the kettle are beginning to vibrate rapidly.

That vibration is in turn being passed on to the water. The water is vibrating so fast that some of it is escaping into the air as steam. That is one explanation of why the kettle is boiling.

It is a valid explanation. But there is another explanation that I could give you. The kettle is boiling because I want a cup of tea. You see, the first explanation is one of mechanism and the second is one of agency.

But the first one does not disqualify the second. Both are absolutely valid explanations of the phenomenon that we're observing. Pitting God against science as explanations of the universe is the equivalent of pitting Henry Ford against the law of internal combustion as explanations for the motor car.

Both are explanations. When Isaac Newton discovered gravity, he didn't say, aha, now we don't need God anymore. Instead, he wrote in the preface to his Principia Mathematica that he wrote the book, and I quote, to bring intelligent people to believe in a deity.

[11 : 32] In the same way that you study art, and as you study art, you begin to appreciate more a Rembrandt and a Picasso. What Newton found was that the more he studied science, the more beautiful he found the God behind it all.

But I have many friends who say, okay, perhaps believing in the idea of a creator God is possible. That doesn't conflict with science, perhaps, but what evidence do you have for it?

You know, isn't it simpler to believe that there is no God? Why do we need this second level of explanation? Isn't that superfluous? Isn't that something extra? And behind this idea is the sense that science is based on evidence, but faith is blind.

It doesn't have any reasons. There's no evidence involved. It's a blind leap of faith. But this is a complete distortion of what the Bible actually says about faith. In the New Testament, the word for faith is the word *pistis*.

It's actually the word that means trust. And it's not a kind of blind trust. It's more the kind of trust that you could put in another person. I give someone my car keys. I trust them with my car, but I'm thinking about the evidence of their character.

[12 : 41] Is this a trustworthy person? Are they careful? It might be the trust you'd put in sitting down in a chair. You know, there is a decision where, of the will, you decide to sit down in the chair, but beforehand, you're going to make sure it seems like it'll hold you up.

It's a decision of the will, but it's one based on evidence. And I'd say the same thing with the faith in God in the Bible. It's a decision of the will, and this isn't a question of proof, but it's surely involving the evidence.

And I find there is substantial evidence for the Christian faith. I think of evidence of fulfilled prophecy, historical evidence for Jesus' death and resurrection, the evidence of beauty and creation, evidence of the moral law within us, evidence of millions of lives changed by Jesus. And I'd say also evidence from science as well. My friends say, ah, what do you mean? Well, one of the greatest discoveries in the scientific world in the last 50 years has been the idea that the universe had a beginning.

Since Aristotle, the consensus had been the universe has always existed. There is no beginning. It's just always been that way. It's a static universe. And when the Big Bang Theory began to gain ascendancy in the 1960s, there was actually strong resistance in the scientific community to this possibility.

[14:03] In fact, the editor of Nature, one of the most prestigious scientific periodicals, published an article saying, the scientific community should resist this idea effectively because it aligns too closely with the biblical account, this idea that there actually was a beginning.

theory. But now, as you might know, the Big Bang Theory is the most widely accepted theory among cosmologists today. Now, it's not proof there is a God, but it certainly is evidence. The fact that most scientists at this university will say, there probably was a time when nothing led to something. Now, that's something to explain. But you might say, well, perhaps it's at least possible there is a creator God, but doesn't it harm science to believe that this is a God who can do things like miracles?

I have many friends who tell me, okay, you don't actually believe in a virgin birth, do you? Or that there was a real physical resurrection. Why do we need to believe those things?

Aren't those just beautiful ideas? What principles we can take from those parts of the Bible? You don't believe that really happened, do you? I do. And I think often what's behind this objection is this assumption people make that miracles break scientific laws.

[15:23] And this is troublesome to people, but I want to push back and say I just don't quite think that's the most precise understanding of what miracles are. Let me give you another illustration. Imagine this, that one day you arrive home to your bedroom and you take out 100 pounds from your wallet, you pull out the bedside table drawer, and you put the 100 pounds in, you close the drawer.

The following day you do the same thing, you pull out another 100 pounds, you put it in the bedside table drawer, you close the door. The following day you come into your room, you peek inside the drawer, and you notice instead of 200 pounds you find 100 pounds.

Now, are you going to assume that the laws of arithmetic have been broken or that the laws of Scotland have been broken? You see, it's because you know the laws of arithmetic that you're able to recognize that something from the outside has come in and intervened.

And it's because we know the scientific laws that we're able to see a miracle for what it is. Because the blind man who Jesus healed knew that people born blind don't regain their sight, he could recognize it as a miracle.

Because we know that bodies from the dead don't come back to life, we can see that's actually a miracle. You see, miracles don't break laws or detract our confidence in science.

[16:42] The only way we can recognize miracles is by knowing the laws of science. See, I think believing in God, far from taking away from science, actually undergirds it.

When you read these first big scientists from the first couple hundred years of this scientific revolution, what inspired them was that they sought out laws in nature because they believed in a law giver.

Johannes Kepler wrote, the chief aim of all investigations of the external world should be to discover the rational order which has been imposed on it by God and which he revealed to us in the language of mathematics.

What inspired these scientific giants in the 15 and 1600s was the conviction that behind because there is an ordered mind behind the universe we can expect order in it.

Belief in a creator undergirds the foundations of modern science. It doesn't take away from it as much as modern scientists might want to think so. I think this passage points us to a creator but also to God's role in two things that science cannot account for, meaning and hope.

[17:51] I get the chance to do this sort of work on university campuses often and many times I hear people say to me, look we just don't need God to explain anything.

Everything is explainable. If we can't explain it now we'll explain it at some point. But I think that there's some things that science will never be able to explain. Let me give you an illustration again. Imagine again I invite you over to my house. After this talk you arrive and I'm sitting with a great big cake in front of me. Let's say that I ask for you to explain the cake and you invite a team of scientists to help you.

You invite a chemist who can tell me what are the different molecules and atoms that are in this cake. You invite a physicist to tell me here are the forces acting on this cake. Gravity is acting this way. The force up from the ground is acting this way.

A nutritionist might be able to explain what the cake will do to me if I eat it in one go. The team of scientists can provide a thorough explanation of things but what they'll never be able to tell me is what the cake is for.

[18 : 56] What's the meaning of the cake? Why is it here? For that piece of information you would need me to reveal that to you. I might say I've made this cake for my great aunt Sally's birthday.

See in this scenario it's no shortcoming of science that it can't answer that question what the cake is for. It's just simply not in science's domain. You need another kind of knowledge to answer the for question.

What's this cake for? What's the meaning of the cake? Revelation that comes from the cake maker. From me.

And in the same way I think there are questions about life, the universe. What's the meaning? Why is there something rather than nothing? What's the meaning of my life? What's the meaning of your life? That science will never be able to answer.

It's just not that. It's a tool that doesn't do that. It's like doing brain surgery with a hammer. It's not what the hammer's for. There's a kind of knowledge that can only come from the maker of the universe, the maker of your life, my life, who can explain that.

[20 : 01] And that's what we see in this passage this morning. God is revealing the meaning of life. We've seen already that in this passage John calls Jesus the word. Now when John writes the word, this uses that word, the word, he's using the Greek word logos.

It's where we get our word logic from. And at least part of what he's doing here is he's introducing a concept from Greek philosophy. See, the logos in the Greco-Roman world was understood to be the divine animating principle behind the universe, the ultimate key to unlock all meaning, this sort of secret knowledge that was out there that explained everything.

meaning. The Epicureans believed that such a logos did not exist. There was no meaning behind the universe. The Stoics believed there was a meaning, but it couldn't be known. Very similar actually to today's world, I'd say, what people say about the meaning.

Well, there isn't one, or perhaps there is one, we just can't know it. But here's the incredible thing. By calling Jesus the logos, John is doing something incredible.

He's saying the key to unlock all meaning, it's not a theory or an idea, it's a person. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

[21 : 13] And then look at verse 2. He was in the beginning with God. John is not saying that God just gives meaning to life, but that he is the meaning of life. The key to unlock all meaning is a person.

Relating with God, the Bible says, is what your life is meant for. That's still a bit abstract. What does it mean to relate to God? Well, verse 4 tells us, look with me, in him was life, and that life was the light of men.

The word John uses here for life isn't the word just for biological life, that's the word bios in the Greek, but the word here is zoe, the word that means life to the full kind of life, not just it's alive, but that it's fulfilled, it's full.

It's a word that's all over the book of John, and uses it 36 times. And essentially, John is saying that, look, to relate to God is to relate to the ultimate source of light and life.

I wonder if you've ever been on a walk in the woods, and you've seen a tree that has a very bent trunk, and you can see that it's bent in such a way in order to reach the light that's streaming down from the taller trees.

[22 : 28] In nature, we see this link between light and life. In the same way, we see that in darkness, living things have their growth stunted. They can't produce fruit. They die. And the whole story of the Bible is one of us running away from God, away from the light.

We know what the right thing is. We don't do it. God's laws are written on our hearts. We don't pay attention to them. And this is an offensive message to our culture. I think it should be offensive to each of us. But I would say, look at the evidence. all the brokenness in the world. No wonder so many people are dissatisfied with life if we're made to live in the life, in the light, in relationship with God. Because we choose to turn away, we're forever dissatisfied. So what is a human life for? John says that your life and my life are meant to be in a relationship with God. I imagine some of those here perhaps wouldn't call themselves Christians. You're looking in the door perhaps, but you haven't come inside. I wonder what do you look for, for your meaning in life, what you think your life is for.

[23 : 36] It might be your work, your family, the next holiday. And of course these are life-giving things to some extent. But the question is, if we look to these things to be our ultimate source of life, will they satisfy us?

If work is your life and you lose your job, you're not just sad, you're crushed. But if work is your life and you don't lose your job, you'll always be anxious that you might. There's no lasting satisfaction there.

There's no stability. And I imagine that many of us are here and are Christians. And this passage I think raises a similar challenge for us. Where are we seeking to find life that's not in Jesus? Sometimes we can figure this out by asking questions like, what are you anxious about? what's the one thing you'd say? If I just had this one thing, everything would be alright, I'd be happy. John reminds us here, these things won't satisfy, but there is something that does. A relationship with God, a relationship that can't be taken away, love that we see proved once and for all on the cross.

[24 : 45] Falling in love with God, John says, is what satisfies. You can't get meaning of life from science, it's not what it's for. But you can get one from the author of science.

We've looked at a God who is a creator, a God who is meaning, and lastly I want to look at a God who gives hope. As with the question of meaning, I don't think science has much to offer on the question of hope either.

From the perspective of science alone, your life ends when your life ends. It's the only thing you actually can be certain of in this life is that you will die. One day your heart will stop beating, you will begin to decompose.

And some of my atheist friends tell me, Logan, don't be so dreary. Human life goes on. You know, I'm building a foundation for my ancestors. But even so, science tells us, one day the sun will expand and swallow the earth and there will be no more, no more humans.

There is ultimately no hope for the long term at least. Sure, there can be short term hopes, but in the long term there's just a sad end. And I think I've never seen this more directly stated than by an atheist named Bertrand Russell.

[25 : 59] He's very honest about this bleakness he sees. Here's what he says. No heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve the individual life beyond the grave.

All the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius are destined to extinction and the vast death of the solar system.

And the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried under the debris of a universe in ruins. All these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.

Now listen to this. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

It's a bleak vision, but at least he's being honest. Science cannot answer the question of hope. Science says the reason you have hope is just so that you'll be motivated to get your genes into the gene pool before it's too late.

[27 : 09] But real hope is an illusion. But the Christian perspective isn't so. Look at verse 5 with me. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it.

Well, you'll notice in your translation, I think, it says understood, and then you'll see a little letter above it, a little A, and if you go down to the bottom of the page, you'll see it says understood or perhaps overcome. And I think that just from the research I was doing on this passage, it seems that it could mean either of those things, it could mean both of those things.

Those are both themes in the book of John, things that he's trying to emphasize. What I want to focus on is this idea that I do think that a valid translation of that word is overcome.

And so I want us to think about it this way. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. In verse 4, we read that the light refers to the word.

So Jesus, the logos. We're also told, though, that there is such a thing as darkness. Darkness is real. It might be that some of us this morning feel that more deeply than others.

[28 : 19] But we're told the darkness has not overcome the light. What does this mean? To know the answer, we'd have to read the rest of John's book. This is only the very beginning. But if we did that, we'd see that it drives the climax of the cross.

On the cross, we see this word, the eternal God, seemingly overwhelmed in darkness, dying the death of a criminal. But then we see it's not an abstract darkness that he's suffering under.

It's our darkness. Alexander Solzhenitsyn was a Soviet critic who spent many years in prison during Stalin's regime.

And after having seen the evil of all those years in prison, the evil that led to the death of perhaps 20 million people, he wrote these incredible words. Gradually, it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart.

And through all human hearts. What Solzhenitsyn is saying is that all of the wrong we see in the world is actually a reflection of the good and evil in every human's heart.

[29 : 40] That's what leads to the broken relationships between nations and parties and individuals. This is the darkness that Jesus endured on the cross, our darkness. Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, puts it this way, he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross.

God bore our darkness, but the darkness did not win. It did not overcome him. Jesus rose from the dead, and the Bible says that Jesus' physical victory over death was a cosmic victory over our darkness that allows us to breathe this sigh of relief that our sins are paid.

We can be right with God. Do you have that relief? Do you know what God will say to you when you see him face to face? You can know if you put your trust in him.

But what does this mean for our darkness today? And I'm going to close just with this. I wonder what darkness you're facing now. It might be sickness or the suffering of someone close.

It might be an internal darkness. But what this passage is telling us is so profound. If you trust in Jesus, because the darkness did not overcome him, it will not overcome you.

[30 : 56] Darkness is real. What this passage is saying is that no matter what darkness you're facing, if you stay near to Jesus, if you stay near to him, let him speak his words of love over you. If you ground yourself in seeing his love for you on the cross, the darkness cannot overcome you.

Even death, we're told, cannot overcome us. Paul writes to the church in Corinth, Oh, death, where is your victory? Oh, death, where is your sting? Jesus rising from the dead is the start of a rescue operation that will end with the end of all suffering and pain and evil.

That is the Christian hope. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Science is not the enemy of faith. It's a wonderful tool.

It enables us to see the magnificence and the genius of the creator. But like any tool, science can only do certain things. It cannot speak to the biggest questions of meaning and hope, no matter how much it advances.

These aren't questions that science is designed to answer. And yet we long for answers. Does your life have lasting meaning, and do you have hope?

[32 : 07] You can. I'm going to pray. Please bow your heads. Lord, we thank you for making us.

Thank you for taking on our darkness. Thank you for being a God big enough for the darkness in our lives. Please be our life and light.

Please meet us in our darkness and give us hope. Amen. I'm going to call the Thank you.