

Maker of Heaven and Earth (part 2)

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] We were looking this morning at what a doctrine was, and we said a doctrine is a teaching! or a set of teachings that hold together, a teaching taught by the Bible in a number of places all drawn together in an orderly way, a firm and reliable set of teachings, fundamental principles for the church and for each individual Christian to build their lives on. And we were looking just now at the doctrine of God, so the teachings about God, in particular God the Creator.

And I said, is it worth bothering with teachings and doctrines? Isn't it just words and thoughts? The answer being, it matters to God who we think He is and what we think He values.

You have to know who you're dealing with when somebody rings you up on the phone and says, hello Mr. Wells, I'm ringing from the so-and-so, what was it, ICM Direct, what's it when they ask you for your opinion on who you're going to vote for? What's that called?

Polling. Yes, opinion poll, that's it, opinion poll. Could I have your date of birth please? No. Would you tell me who you're going to vote for? No. Could you tell me who your MP is, Caroline Lucas? Oh, you know that then, yes I do, live next, don't live next door, don't live around the corner from it. Anyway, but who on earth was this man ringing me up? Should I give him my date of birth? What's he going to ask for next? My bank account number? Who you are personal with, make sure it's the right person. And we are meant to be personal with God, we're meant to disclose everything to Him. We need to make sure it's the right God that we're doing this to, because there are false gods.

There are gods who claim to be gods and who are not.

We become like what we worship. The atheist objector might say, religions cause wars, so ban them all. But we do become like the God we worship, and some gods are cruel gods.

[2:21] Our God is not a cruel God. He says, be holy for I am holy. He wants us to imitate Him in all sorts of good and beautiful ways. And then also, the big sins of the Bible that have a lot said about them are usually not what we would think sexual sins, but worship sins of people pouring out their hearts and pouring out their lives to gods that don't exist, to gods that have just been handmade, that their hearts or heads have made, which is a stupid thing because such a God cannot save.

And it's a perverse thing because God is really very angry if we distort Him and prefer a sort of artificial version of God to the real God. Our God is in heaven. He does whatever pleases Him.

Their idols are silver and gold made by the hands of men. They have mouths but cannot speak, eyes but they cannot see. They have ears but they cannot hear, noses but they cannot smell.

They have hands but they cannot feel, feet but they cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats. And those who make them will be like them. And so will all who trust in them.

Those are the, that's the sort of harsh criticism that the Bible makes of idols. So we said, what can we say about the God of the Bible? Well, perhaps almost the very first thing that we're told as a foundation truth is that He is the maker of heaven and earth. And that's a doctrine from Genesis, clearly stated in the beginning, God made the heaven and earth. And after that seven-day process, thus the heavens and the earth and all their hosts were completed. The heavens and the earth were completed and all their occupants, their hosts. So we looked, we tried to pick up some threads, picking up the meaning and implication of this. And what we looked at this morning was the one kings, it wasn't one kings, it was two kings actually, 19, where Hezekiah, the king, is threatened by this huge aggressive army. And he spreads out the letter of ultimatum that's come to him. He comes before the Lord in the temple and he says to the Lord, O Lord God of Israel, you who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are the maker of heaven and earth. And I make my appeal to

you. You're the right person to come because you've made everything. All the kingdoms of the earth are yours. You're high above all this. Who better to pray to than you? Who can answer this prayer but you? Look, O Lord, open your ears, see what the king of Assyria has sent to insult you, the living God. So we have that wonderful prayer.

[5:36] It is a wonderful prayer. We looked at Psalm 121, didn't we? Do you want to look at Psalm 115? Because that was the one I was quoting. So this does the same sort of thing.

And we sang this this morning, but here it is that I just quoted from actually, Psalm 115. 5. And this is the one that says, not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory because of your love and faithfulness. Why do the nations say, where is their God? Well, nations might well say that because the religion of Israel has no pictures of God. It has no statues of God. It doesn't have icons of God. It doesn't have any of those things. And inside the temple, when you go right into the middle of it, which you shouldn't go into, but if you were to go, it's more or less empty. So the nations say, where is their God? And the Psalmist says, you guys who've got gods, you've got wooden gods and stone gods and prefabricated gods and gods made out of plaster and gods made out of polystyrene and those gods that you can see, well, the fact that you can see them gets you absolutely nowhere because your gods are rubbish. They've got noses, but they can't smell. They've got feet, but you have to nail them down. Otherwise they fall over.

They've got eyes, but they can't see. Those are the rubbish gods. Our God, you can't see him, but the reason you can't see him is that he is in the place of power. He is in the place, he is in heaven. And it says in Psalm 115 verse 3, our God is in heaven. He does what pleases him. That's a place where nobody is threatening God. Nobody is contradicting him. He has the ultimate say, our God is in heaven. He does what pleases him. It's your idols that are rubbish. Our God is in heaven. He does what pleases him. And then you get this call in verse 9, house of Israel, trust in the Lord. He is their help and shield. House of Aaron, trust in the Lord. He is their help and shield. You who fear him, trust in the Lord. He is their help and shield. And the Lord remembers us and will bless us.

And it says in verse 15, may you be blessed by the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Now, you are obviously very receptive, quick on the uptake people. So I guess the repetition of this is probably for people like me who are a bit stupid and take a long time to get the point. But the Lord is emphasizing this point again and again, isn't he? You're blessed if your help comes from the Lord who is the maker of heaven and earth. He keeps on saying it, doesn't he? And we might say, well, I don't feel very blessed. And the Bible says, well, you're very stupid then, aren't you?

Because you are blessed if your help is in the Lord who made the heaven and earth. You are blessed. You are in a position of blessing. And he says the highest heaven belongs to the Lord, but the earth he has given to man. He's given us some things to do, a place to live. He's given us stuff to get on with. And that's what we're to do. And our help comes from the Lord who made the heavens and the earth. That's the declaration of this psalm and all the other texts like it. So, Lord, help us to get that. Okay, so we're going to, I said New Testament, so let's go into New Testament.

[9:53] It's the Old Testament that hammers home the doctrine of God the Creator. It's the Old Testament that hammers home. There is one God, you alone are Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. You don't have a rival. There aren't alternatives. That is the identity of the God of the Bible. He's the one who made the heavens and the earth. And it hammers that home. New Testament doesn't hammer that home all over again. It assumes that and then lays other truths on top of it. And I should say there's more in the Old Testament than we covered either this morning or just now. If you'd like to look it up on your app, do a search on heaven and earth or a search on Creator and you'll see there's a lot more that says actually the same thing and emphasizes it. Well, let's look at some takes on this in the New Testament. So, let's first of all go to Acts 14 verses 9 to 20 or around there. So, this is what happens when Bible religion comes into contact with the paganism of the Roman Empire, the Greek speaking cities culture of the Roman Empire. And this is in, correct me if I'm wrong, this is in Lystra,

Acts 14 verse 8. In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had

faith to be healed and called out, stand up on your feet. And at that the man jumped up and began to walk.

So, it's a miracle. It does backfire. Miracles don't, miracles like this don't guarantee that people have well-informed faith. Verse 11, the crowd saw what Paul had done. They shouted in the Lycaonian language, the gods have come down to us in human form. Completely misunderstand what's happened.

Barnabas they called Zeus. Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker and the priest of Zeus whose temple was just outside the city brought balls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, to them. And when the apostles Paul and Barnabas heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed into the crowd shouting, man why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God who made the heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them.

In the past he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony. He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons. He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. And even with these words they have difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. And then within a swath of a few sentences they can't get rid of them quickly enough and they stone Paul and drag him out of the city. Anyway, what is the teaching here? It does reference, does it not? The Lord who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. It references God as creator. And it differentiates him from idols. The handmade, man-made, man-made, man-invented idols like Hermes, Jupiter, Mars, these Greek gods, Roman gods.

[13:51] And his argument is an argument of generosity. And he says, there's one God who is the giver of the things that surround you. So you've got there in verse 17, he gives you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons. He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.

This comes from the one God who made heaven and earth. It links the doctrine of God as creator with the doctrine of God as sustainer and provider. So those two things link together.

But his argumentation is this. God has shown himself to you and he's shown himself to you in the fact that after lunch today, you might mentally have patted your stomach and said, that was very nice.

In fact, I can actually say that Wes, who is not here this evening, did that very thing. He patted his stomach after the lunch and said, that was very satisfactory, something like that. And Paul's argument is every time you do that, every time anybody does that, God is speaking to that person and saying, look at me, I gave you all this. I am a good, kind, generous God and I am not keeping quiet about it. It says he has given you testimony, verse 17. And the testimony says, don't worship idols. How ridiculous to worship the God of war or the God of love or these made-up gods. Worship the one true God whose definition is he made everything. So there's Paul in Acts 14 with an argument of generosity. The testimony of full tummies, the call to turn to the living God.

And yeah, every full tummy is a call to repent. That's what it's saying, isn't it? So God calls in different ways. And our city is a very foodie city, isn't it? We have competitions for the best restaurants and the best food. And that really, I'm just thinking, ought to make us a city of great faith and gratitude for all God's goodness. Unfortunately, it doesn't work like that. But it ought to. It ought to. Let's look at Acts 17. So here is another New Testament take. And remember, he's speaking to people who haven't read the Old Testament.

[17:05] He's speaking to people who haven't read Genesis or Psalm 121 or Psalm 104 or Psalm 115. So he has to do a very quick catch-up on all of that. And in Acts 17, which is what we read, Paul goes to Athens.

I remember listening to some sermons by Dick Lucas on this, and he said, it's rather like going to Oxford. They look down their noses at you as soon as you've gone off the station. And you can sort of smell the arrogance. That's what he said. And all talkers, there they have a plum in there.

Anyway. And so this is Paul. And he's actually invited to go to the big, I don't know what the, Areopagus is like a council meeting, is it? Or a university debating society meeting? I don't know.

I do pick up in verse 18. Some of them said, what is this babblers trying to say? It's very condescending, isn't it? It means a seed picker. He's like a little bird going, what is this sort of

ragamuffin? You know, what is he, what is he, not what is he saying, what is he trying to say? Poor man can't get his words out properly. Come on, Paul. Come on, you can do it, you can do it. You know, it's very sort of looking down at him, isn't it? What is this man, what is this babbler trying to say? He seems to be advocating foreign gods. Anyway, so they bring him to the Areopagus, and he says this meeting. And it's a classic preaching of the biblical God to pagan people. Paul is respectful.

[19:05] Men of Athens, I see this in every way. You are very religious. So that could be taken in two ways. It could be a positive, it could be a negative, it could be both at once. But you could certainly take it positively. You do take your religion seriously, and they do. As I walked and looked carefully at your objects of worship, he doesn't mention the fact that you've been so upset by seeing these statues all over the place, these idols. Men of Athens, I walked around, I looked carefully at your objects of worship. I even found an altar with this inscription, to an unknown god. Right, says Paul, I'm going to pick up on the, there's admission here that there is a god that you don't know about.

All the other ones are rubbish. I'm not going to say that, but that's what they are. So I'll positively take the unknown god and tell you about this god that you as yet know nothing about.

What you worship as something unknown, I'm going to proclaim to you. The god who made the world and everything in it, see, the doctrine of creation, is the lord of heaven and earth. And he's going on to say a number of things about the creator. So on my screen thing, I put, they are very religious, but he's going to say, and I think politely he will say to them, you're actually ignorant. So verse 30, in the past God overlooked such ignorance.

So all the, here's all these university professors and BBC2, you know, there's a news night crew. What's the name of the chap who does news night? Paxman's finished. Who's the, who's the other one? We don't know, do we?

Evan? Davis, is it? Evan Davis. He's there as well. Okay. Clever, articulate. Andrew Marr.

[21:04] Andrew Marr. Okay. You just imagine them, they're all there. And they say, come on, Paul. I know you can, you know, try. Tell us something. And he's saying, he's being respectful to them, but he's quietly saying you're ignorant.

I don't know whether I'm trying saying that to Jeremy Paxman. But, so he's got a bit of a nerve, actually, but he does it very politely.

And he says, he says, the Lord who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made by hands.

And he is not served by human hands as if he needed anything because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. So, you notice he's affirmed things and he's contradicted things. And the contradiction says, you, pagan, ignorant people, think that you provide accommodation for the Lord.

[22:14] The Lord of heaven does not live in temples built by hands. You think, it's a sort of characteristic of paganism, isn't it, that you build a house or a shrine or a place for your God.

And he says that's complete misunderstanding because he, let's just see, in, I'm thinking of verse 26.

From one man he made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth. He determined the time set for them and the exact places where they should live. So, it isn't that you provide accommodation for God.

It's God provides accommodation for you. He's been doing that full stop. He's got a place for you, a set place, a place he's appointed for you.

It isn't that he depends on you, otherwise he'd be homeless. It's actually the other way around. You depend on him, otherwise you'd be homeless. He gives you a place.

[23:18] And he says, we don't supply him with what he needs. He supplies us with what we need. Notice that in verse 25. He is not served by human hands as if he needed anything.

And the pagan thinking is that our gods need stuff. So, it's quite characteristic, isn't it, if you've been in a culture where they have idols.

And I would include, if I dare, Roman Catholic culture and probably Greek Orthodox culture of little niches, little spots along the road with food and flowers and little offerings.

As if the gods would get hungry. As if the gods would get hungry if you didn't feed them and offer them stuff. They need that. And Paul says, actually, that's completely wrong.

The gods are not served by... It isn't that we supply them with what they need. It's the other way around. He supplies us with what we need. He doesn't need things, verse 25.

[24:27] He himself gives us life and breath and everything else. You've got it completely wrong. Our understanding should be immersed in this fact that everything I have, everything I've ever had, everything I have at this moment now is supplied by the God of heaven.

Life and breath and everything else is given by him. That's the fundamental truth.

So, even as we sit here, our hearts beat, we involuntarily breathe in and out. God gives us that.

We're upheld by him. So, he says, the pagans got completely the wrong idea. And he sets this up, says Paul, so that we would seek him.

Verse 27. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. And again, this idea that God is calling people to turn to him.

[25:39] This is not the call of the full stomach, perhaps. It's the call of how God has put us in a certain place, given us so many things. And he's, well, he's put us in a certain place so that we would seek him and reach out for him and find him.

And he says he's not far from each one of us. That's a fantastic statement, isn't it? And there were, we had some visitors from China with us this morning who had come from their country and God had brought them here, plonked them here to do some study.

And one of the people, this is the first only time they have ever been in a Christian assembly. First time they had ever heard in a Christian assembly the Bible read.

And perhaps God set that person in that place so that they would seek for God and reach out for him and find him. So God sets this up so that we should seek him.

And then Paul says, still really in this doctrine of God as creator, but he's applying it. He says, in him we live and move and have our being. That's a quote.

[26:58] I can't remember the name of the poet, but it's a quote from one of their poems. And as some of your poets have said, we are his offspring. So even in that society that didn't have the Old Testament, they've got some understanding.

God is, by his, we would say, common grace, meaning his goodness that extends to everybody. They've got some understanding of God.

It's muddled. It's ignorant. But there's something there. In him we live and move and have our being. We are his offspring. And then Paul tells them what they should not think.

Of course, the repentance that he's looking for is a lot about how they think about God. And the repentance that he's looking for is this.

We, since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold. Or silver or stone, an image made by man's design or skill.

[28:09] We should not think that. To think that is an insult to the living God. To let yourself go along that line is an insult to the living God.

We should not think that, he says. And they might say, well, come on, Paul. We've spent millions commissioning this gold statue of Zeus.

How can that be wrong? I mean, that's brilliant. The artistry and that. We've got our best guys on that. They've worked for years. We've spent millions on it. And he says, yeah, it's gold.

That's the best stuff. That's wrong. We should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone.

Even the best stuff you have to offer is an insult to God. He's not that. He is not. Every time you try and make a statue of him or a picture of him or an image of him, you reduce him intolerably so as to

insult him.

[29:24] He is in heaven. He is not capturable in wood and stone and things like that. So we should not think that he is like gold and silver.

And we should think, we should know, we should take notice that he has set a terminus day for this world at which he will stop the progress of civilization and politics and philosophy.

Say that's enough. Enough is enough. And he will judge the world. In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, verse 30. But now he calls, he commands all people everywhere to repent.

For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. So this doctrine of God the creator focuses down in terms of time, on a day of judgment, and in terms of a person, on the person of Jesus Christ.

What is our access to this creator God? What is our way of being right with this creator God answer through Jesus Christ? Paul doesn't present him in his official capacity of sacrifice, although he could do that.

[30:43] But as in his flow of argument, he presents Jesus Christ in his official capacity as the judge. And, of course, the way of being forgiven in a court is to speak to the judge, to get to the judge before he pronounces sentence and cast yourself on his mercy.

So he says, God will, in due course, at last, one day, judge. And we should turn to him.

You see there's a sort of consistency about this, isn't it? We turn to the God who has made us, the Lord who made the heavens and the earth. And how do we turn to him? We turn to him through Jesus Christ.

He's the key to meeting the creator. Okay. Let's look at... I'll just flag up some of the other references, and we'll see whether we will do them.

So there's another big reference in Romans chapter 1. There's references in Revelation of the honor due to the creator.

[32:21] And let's look at Revelation 5, because I think this is worth looking at while we're in the vicinity. So the book of Revelation has a take on God as creator.

And the take works a bit like this, that he is the creator. All the idols of wood and stone and whatever else idols can be made of are an insult to God.

People who follow them should repent. The way to repent is to come to the Lamb. And the honor ought to go to God the creator. And if you look in Revelation chapter 4, verse 9, this is the worship of heaven.

Revelation chapter 4, verse 9. Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor to thanks to him who sits on the throne and him who lives forever and ever, the 24 elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever.

They lay their crowns before the throne and they say, You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being.

[33:52] So there's sort of essence of worship of the creator. Because he is the creator, he deserves all glory and honor and power. And you notice the vocabulary of praise, glory and honor and power.

You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power. It's divine worship to the creator. It's interesting to go over into chapter 5 because we have another character brought to our attention, which is the Lamb upon the throne.

So previously this was the one who sits on the throne, i.e. God the Father. And in chapter 5 we are introduced to the Lamb. Chapter 5, verse 6.

And interestingly to him is said that he is worthy. Verse 9. You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God.

From every tribe and language and people and nation you have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth. And verse 12. In a loud voice they said, Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.

[35:07] So interestingly the creator is worshipped with a certain vocabulary and the same vocabulary is now employed to Jesus the Son, the Lamb.

The creator is praised because he is the creator for his creation. The Lamb is praised for his redemption. And the praise is the same, isn't it?

It uses the same words. It is as much. And then in verse 13. I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them saying, thank you, to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever. And the four living creatures said amen and the elders fell down and worshipped. So there we have the worship of God the creator in all its splendor and fullness and resounding majesty and it is coupled inseparably with the worship of the Lamb, the Redeemer who is resoundingly praised not only for making us but for redeeming us and for redeeming all the nations, representatives of all the nations, to serve him forever.

And on that note, I think, is the one to stop. So it's a great picture, isn't it? I hope I didn't speak too fast because I got a bit carried away. But there's a great picture of God who made the heavens and the earth and his glory and the fact that for believing people our help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth and our praise goes to God, the maker of heaven and earth and it goes through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, who brings us to his Father, the one who shows us the Father.

[37:13] We wouldn't know him unless the Son chose to reveal him to us and we come to him and we praise him for that. I think that's a good thought to close with. Let's sing.

Let's sing.