

GOD WITH US : ADORE

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we confess before you that unless your Holy Spirit moves in our minds and hearts and wills, the very depths of our soul, unless you, Father, move in us, we cannot understand your word correctly.

So we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would gently but deeply fall upon us, fall upon our bodies, fall upon our minds, fall upon our hearts and our wills. Father, may your Holy Spirit fall upon us and fan into flame within us that we might use the best of our mind and the best of our heart and the best of our will to seek to understand your word, but we know that that is never sufficient.

So we ask, Father, that you would lead us ever more deeply into your word, that your word might go ever more deeply into us, and that we may bear much fruit for your glory in our day-to-day lives.

And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. Last week I didn't have a stopwatch.

I have no idea how long I preach for, so that can be a bit of a dangerous thing. I'm going to do a couple of very un-Canadian things this morning. I'm going to maybe cause a little bit of stress in the room, and I'm sort of, I think, compelled to cause a little bit of stress in the room because of the nature of the biblical text that we're going to look at, and because, like, I'm going to mention creation and evolution and Christmas.

[1 : 3 0] And that, as soon as I mention creation and evolution and Christmas, in many Canadian contexts, it causes a little bit of stress.

And you might wonder why on earth I'm going to do that. Andrew, could you put up the first slide, please? Could you, we don't have to say the verse thing. Could you read this with me, please?

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

So we're going to look at today. And the thing about this text is that it draws a... Actually, when I...

You know, at first, when I was wanting to talk about this text, I wanted to say that it sort of drew a line in the sand, and then I realized after I'd been actually, you know, talking about it for a while, so in my own head, I talk about it in my head, that when I say drawing a line in the sand, drawing a line in the sand is a very, very arbitrary thing.

[2 : 3 9] You know, it's as if you have all this sand, you're just not going to retreat anymore, you're not going to give up anymore, you're going to draw this arbitrary line right here, and on the other side, but you're going to take your stand. And the fact of the matter is, is that this isn't drawing a line in the sand.

This text is pointing out a grand canyon between what the Bible teaches and what a lot of... and basically everything else.

And that causes a bit of stress for people when we realize that it's sort of pointing out a big grand canyon between what this text is claiming and to which is generally believed in our country and throughout the world.

Because this text is making a very, very bold claim that, you know, look at the last sort of two and a half lines. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

And the word made is a perfectly good word, but in the original language, it just says something...

[3 : 52] It goes sort of beyond the English word. It'd be awkward to translate the original language into English, but it actually... The word that we use here is made, actually in the original language, says cause to exist.

Causes to exist. And so this text is making a very, very, very big claim that all things were caused to exist through him, and without him was not anything that was caused to exist that came into existence.

That's what the text is saying. And it sort of flies in the face of what we learn or students learn. If you go to university, if you go to high school, go to elementary school in this country, where we're taught something very, very different.

And I'm not going to solve all of that. I'm just trying to draw it out. But I want to say a couple of things about that. The first thing is that... I'm going to be very un-Canadian.

Remember I mentioned at the beginning I was going to be very un-Canadian. Hopefully you'll extend me a little bit of grace. Here's the first thing about what this statement is and our culture.

[5 : 09] You're cutting me some slack, okay? Just for a moment. I'm actually a nice guy, even though I'm going to say something which is a very rude thing to say in Canada. And if you're here and you believe what I'm about to sort of make a comment about, I hope, you know, rather than being offended, like I'll buy you coffee sometime this week.

I'll buy you lunch, okay? Like I'm actually a nice guy. But there's many people in our country who are, you know, who are Buddhists and Hindus and who believe in things like native spirituality.

But who here really honestly for a second actually believes that any of the accounts of these things is actually a real account of anything? Like it's very un-Canadian to say that native spirituality can't be possibly true, but nobody believes that the world came to be because ravens dropping seeds or things are carried on the back of turtles or like nobody believes that.

Nobody believes that that's the way things came to be, right? Like nobody does. Like if a person had a PhD in biochemistry and said that he'd like to teach a class in biochemistry and said that he was going to teach these things as part of his lecture at the university, he or she would be fired, right?

I mean, it would be beyond mockery. In fact, if that was to happen at the Ottawa U or Carleton, it would be on everything. It would be on Letterman. It would be on the late night. It would be on all the comics and everybody would be making fun.

[6 : 43] And in fact, actually, in our culture, there's a dominant story about how all things have come into existence. But practically speaking, in our culture, there's not, you know, the, in a sense, I'll call it the atheistic option because that's actually what it is, the atheistic option and the Christian option and the Buddhist option and the Hindu option and the Cree option and the Algonquin option and the Navajo option.

And that's, in fact, not the case, right? There's really only three options that people think about. And one of them, actually, scientists basically always will tell you that it's completely and utterly misleading.

The misleading one is this idea that evolution is somehow making things better and better and better and that evolution causes things and that we're moving in this particular type of direction.

And that's actually all it is is just a romantic type of pious, unfounded hope that science would have to say it's actually not scientifically true, that everything that happens is just a result of time and chance, that that's what evolution is.

It's purely and utterly chance. There's no purpose. There's no such thing as better. There's really only next. And, obviously, it's a very, very uncomfortable belief and that's why people tend to quickly try to bring in other types of things of purpose.

[8 : 17] But it's actually, from a scientific level, all you can say is before, now, next. And what governs these changes is always just complete and utter chance, really.

and then the only other option I mean and it's usually just mocked is the Christian option because I mean that would also get you fired maybe at Ottawa or Carleton but at least our culture makes fun of it like it's recognized that there is at least some type of a credibility or threat from it and I want to say that actually let's say this text again could you say it with me in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God he was in the beginning with God all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made that's a serious philosophical and scientific claim and it's that serious philosophical and scientific claim that that actually helped to cause the birth of all science and is the partially historically the basis by which scientists seek order in the world because there's a sense that there's a knowable God a creator and a plan and design and that you can seek after the outline of the plan and the outline of the design and it's a serious option be a whole other topic a little bit about how it is that we can reconcile this with science

I think it's easily done I know that Christians can have on one side of the Grand Canyon the biblical side that Christians can differ over the age of the earth and a couple of other things but those are arguments on one side of the Grand Canyon it's different on the other side of the Grand Canyon and it's a serious claim I don't know how many of you have heard of the name of Thomas Nagel he's a serious atheistic philosopher often the more popular people who write books aren't necessarily considered to be serious philosophers but he is beyond any doubt a very serious philosopher and a long time atheist and he just I think about a year and a half ago caused a minor storm because he wrote a book showing why it is that evolution is not true and he's an atheist by the way at the beginning of the book and the end of the book he's still an atheist he just basically wanted to point out that while God obviously doesn't exist and therefore everything that came to be has to come to be by some means that in fact evolution can't account for it and that the sooner that scholars recognize that it can't account for it the proper account that will continue to show that there is no God will be found and that's a

I mean he's one of a small group of serious atheist thinkers over the last five to ten years who've started to express doubts in academic journals and in books as to whether in fact Darwinistic evolution in fact can actually account for the existence of all things and every one of them who've written these books still continue to believe that God does not exist but they're merely pointing out the fact that the theory doesn't work that it can't account for important things I believe that if you study it we can't go into it right now in the sermon but it's very very interesting that John who's going to talk and this is one of the two classic texts as we go on to verse 14 that John that gives one of the most classic accounts of the birth of Jesus begins it with where we as Canadian Christians are afraid to go which is to publicly claim that there is a God that does exist who is the one who's created all things and sustains all things that in fact if we were to watch a science fiction movie and in the science fiction movie going to unexplored places they come across an obviously very very ancient and spaceship with no creatures there and it's maybe the power source is no longer functioning and this ship of ours comes and discovers it and if that happened in a movie the very very obvious thing especially if it happened early on in the movie obviously it'd be the case that for the rest of the movie the movie is going to be consumed with trying to figure out who it was that used that ship at one time who is this ancient race and we would all know that if one of the people on the ship our spaceship if they were to say no that ship did not that just happened by an explosion it purely happened by chance there's nothing to seek but that wouldn't be treated seriously in the movie because it would be very obvious that if you saw something as intricate as a spaceship even with no people that it was something built and designed and that's at the heart the simple Christian claim that what we see around us and that the universe

I mean just a cell a human cell just DNA is more complex than that spaceship and on one hand that's why I was just talking to a barista just a couple of weeks ago and who's definitely not a Christian and she said on one hand okay I know that there has to be something that created all things because that can only account for it but you're wrong which was very refreshing to hear it didn't bother me or threaten me at all and there are many people in our culture who are caught between this idea that the order and the complexity and the beauty that we see has to be accounted for some way and when science and atheists you know when they push to the idea that in fact everything just came to be as completely and utterly as well as a chance that there's this conflict in the soul and the mind and the heart of many people in our culture which is why in our culture it's far more common to slip in ideas of purpose and destiny and design in the theory of evolution that it's easy to slip it in it's easy you know evolutionary psychology slips in this idea of things being in us because of some type of design and moral imperatives and it gets slipped into it but it doesn't actually the theory of evolution cannot support that it all crumples if you think if you think about it very deeply but let's read this again together in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God he was in the beginning with God all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made you know not only does this text

[15:33] I'm going to do another very un-Canadian thing for a moment and once again I hope you're going to give me some grace if you're deeply offended I'll about this I'll try to deal with it later on because I don't mean to be mean but there's a lot of fear in Canada right now I think it's you know been made worse by what happened just a few blocks from here just a few weeks ago and I think it's made worse by ISIS or ISIL or whatever however we're supposed to refer to them and you know it just these beheadings and the terrible terrible terrible things that are being done it causes people to wonder about their safety and people wonder about why why like why can't these people and that's the type of language that we use okay I'm not pardoning it I'm just I'm trying to echo it like why don't these people just have this sense of our common humanity like why are they so inhumane like why are they so cruel like why why don't they understand that on one level we're sort of all the same and that we should need to get together just as I think that the sort of the governing story of our elite institutions of media and culture and academia

I don't think they can really account for the complexity of the world and the beauty of the world I also don't think they can really account for this whole problem of inhumanity because you see the idea that there's like one human race and that we're to treat each other humanely is not a scientific truth it's not a biological truth it's a theological truth that comes from the understanding that there is one creator of one humanity and while obviously it is biologically true that human beings by definition are human beings and scientists can prove whether or not something is human the fact of science doesn't create within human beings any sense of being one united humanity that flows from the idea of there being but one

God who has created all things it's a theological truth it's not a scientific and biological truth say this text again with me notice the beginning of the text in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God he was in the beginning with God all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made you know here it says in the beginning it's obviously echoing those of you who know your bible a little bit it's echoing genesis chapter 1 it's saying that before there was anything there was the word before there was anything it's in a sense before there was time before the big bang before there was anything there was the word and in the original language next phrase and the word was with God in the original language in English there's only one word for was but in the original language there's three words for was so that in sorry not was with in the original language there's three different words for with and so if I was to say that I'm with my dog or I'm with my car and I'm with my wife, the first two withs might or might not be one of the two different words, but there'd be no mistaking that in the third case, there's a word for with that's only used when a person is with a person in the original language.

And in the original language, when it says, in the beginning was the word, talking about the word and that before all time, before there's anything, there is the word.

And then the second phrase when it says, and the word was with God, that with is the word that's only used of a person with a person. And so it's saying the word's a person and this person is with God who's also a person.

[20 : 12] And the word who's before all things and is a person who's with God is also God. And the word was God.

And it's saying here that there's two persons, but it's also saying very clearly that there's only one God. It's a deep mystery.

He was in the beginning with God. It emphasizes it. Augustine, who lived about 1,700 years ago, when he was commenting about this, he said that those words should be written in gold in the most beautiful script in every church that exists.

That's what he said. It should be there in gold because it's so central. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. And there's this very, very clear teaching that there is one God in two persons.

[21 : 16] The deity of the Holy Spirit will be developed later on in the Gospel of John and in other parts of the New Testament. But here is the introduction of the book. It's trying to communicate to us that there's only one God, and this one God has made all things, brought into existence all things.

And we human beings are things. And human beings are made as a body and as a soul, in fleshed souls or embodied spirits.

There are different ways to put it. We're both soul and body, but we're just one thing. We're not two things. And God made both of those parts that make us us. And because there is but one God, and that one God has not only created all things, this is also the basis whereby you should not rape the environment.

And it's going to be the basis. If you read the Old Testament in Genesis 1, it talks about how God has made all things. And later on, there will be laws about the proper treatment of animals and the proper treatment of people.

And it's all because of this understanding that God is not part of his creation. He's made all things. All things are properly, fully his. And because of that, all things are to be cared for.

[22 : 36] And in particular, human beings that are made in the image and likeness of God. Every human being is not just biologically a human being, but what makes a human being a human being is not just biology, but that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God.

And there is one humanity and one God. That one humanity and one God is proven by biology and proven by science. And philosophers like Thomas Nagel, who are serious philosophers and serious atheists, said that the atheistic account of origins does not, in fact, hold intellectual water and can't, in fact, account for all of the things that we see, nor all of the experiences that we experience.

That the idea that all things come about as a result of time and chance does not account for the fact that we see order. And the fact that we have things like love and that we sense things like beauty and we sense things like music as being glorious.

And that we can watch dance and think that there's something majestic about a well-choreographed human being's dancing in beautiful choreography, that there's something glorious and uplifting about that.

That the dance accounts for things better than chance accounts for things. Dance accounts for things better than chance accounts for things.

[24 : 01] And so, you know, our culture, on one hand, we have this sense that being human matters. That in cultures where the human person has absolutely no value, if you have a caste system, if you have a slave system, if you have a totalitarian system, that being a person matters.

And that there should be this common sense of personhood whether or not it is recognized. That is, in fact, a theological truth that goes back to the book of Genesis and the book of John and the entire scriptures.

And in fact, I would ultimately say that no other system of thought properly grounds that fundamental experience and insight we have as human beings.

That Hinduism and Buddhism and science and atheistic science cannot account for these things and ground them in a way which is both intellectually respectable and scientifically examinable.

And it's just compellingly true. Join with me in saying this again. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[25 : 21] He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. Those of you who come to the church are probably wondering, why doesn't George have any points?

I kept struggling to have points. And God said, George, how are you going to improve on John 1, 1 to 3? Like, how am I going to improve on that?

And I was thinking, well, I guess I can't. So that's why we're going to keep saying it over and over again. You get nothing else out of this, but you've started to memorize John 1, 1 to 3, then angels are happy, God is happy, and I'm happy.

In fact, let's say it again. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

So some of you might say, here's my last very un-Canadian moment, okay? So some of you might say, George, okay, that's very, very interesting that you say that it's a theological truth that if you have one God and one humanity, that there's this common, there's this sense of the dignity of persons, and that there's a, you know, when you talk about treating human beings in a certain type of way, that it, because human beings are all human beings, that that's a theological, that's a very interesting thing.

[26 : 49] But ISIS believes all that too, don't they? So that's the last un-Canadian moment.

I'm coming to a conclusion with it. And so, George, what do you say about that? It can't obviously be true. And I would say, you're right, it's not sufficient. It's not enough.

Because, you see, you could come to the conclusion that there's one God and one humanity, but God is, in fact, very, very distant, doesn't care anything about humanity at all. You could believe there's one God who's created all things, and therefore all human beings are sort of the same.

But actually, fundamentally, God views all human beings as slaves, as fodder, as being completely and utterly irrelevant, and one doesn't want to really deal with them. And, in fact, actually, when God is going to try to deal with these pesky little human beings that he has no particular regard for, he'll pick a few that he likes, and the rest he doesn't really care about.

And when he even deals with them, he deals with them through intermediaries. He doesn't actually deal with them directly, but through intermediaries. You see, and I don't mean to cast dispersions, in the Koran, even the Koran is not God dealing with human beings directly, but through intermediaries.

[28 : 09] And, in fact, it's not clear from the Koran of the dignity and value of human beings. It's not clear, in fact, whether human beings are but slaves that can justify slavery and all sorts of things.

Not directly. I'm not saying that that's what the Koran does, but there's a missing piece. Let's say this again, and then, Andrew, after we've said this again, if you could put up the next slide.

Join with me in saying this again. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

11 verses later. And say it with me. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And the Word became flesh. John wants us to understand that every word we are going to go, if you go back and decide that between now and the next couple of weeks, you're going to read all of the Gospel of John.

[29 : 20] You want to hear about Jesus as John bears witness to Jesus. And John wants us to know at the very beginning that Jesus is not a great man. And I am not insulting him when I say that.

Jesus is not a great man. Jesus is God. Jesus is God who has taken, set aside his glory, and brought into himself our human nature in its completion, and walks amongst us.

And that is who we are reading about. And this brings us to the final thing, which I can only touch on very briefly. It brings on an unbelievable coherence.

You see, one of the things which is so challenging and embracing, if you try to read a philosopher like Thomas Nagel, is that he doesn't believe you go to a better place when you die.

Die, you die. Fertilizer. Fertilizer. And God didn't create us. It's probably going to have to be by chance in some way.

[30 : 28] We just have to figure out a better scientific mechanism and description than evolution has given us. And we live our lives, and, you know, we live our lives according to whatever things about how to try to get along, and, you know, basically utilitarian type of ethics, and you sort of get along, and it's sort of best if you do certain types of things, and there's a great consistency and coherence in it.

But notice here, the Bible is telling us that the same one who brought all things into existence is the same one who comes and takes into himself our human nature and walks amongst us, is the same one when you read John's Gospel who is going to teach us how to live, is the same one who is going to die upon the cross to be the power of God for salvation for all who believes in him, is the same one who will rise and defeat sin and death and all hostile spiritual powers.

He's the same one who will ascend into heaven, and he is the same one who will return and will bring in the new heaven and the new earth. And it's not that you have one type of account of creation, another account of how to live, another account of what is going to fix things, and another account of what happens after you die.

It's not like the average Canadian, and I don't mean to insult anybody who's here, who on one hand believes that, yes, everything that came to be came about as a result of time and chance. That's evolution.

And yes, when I die, I'm going to go to a better place. And yes, when I live my life, I'm going to live my life according to these types of moral rules. And they never ask themselves, one moment, if I'm going to go to a better place, maybe that should affect the way that I live.

[32 : 09] In one moment, if I'm just a complete result of time and chance, how on earth am I going to go to a better place? How on earth is that going to happen? And it's only not viewed as incoherent, because that's what everybody believes.

But it's not, I do not mean to offend, it's not coherent. Brave souls like Thomas Nagel recognizes that it's not incoherent, incoherent, and lives his life in an attempt to be intellectually consistent.

But we see here that not only does the Christian faith, not only does the Bible offer us this profound account that everything, that the thing which is the most basic, the beginning of all things is God, that he's the one who brings all things into existence.

And that because he brings all things into existence, we can have this sense that there's, that's why there's order, that's why there's beauty, that's why there's joy, that's why there's love, that's why there's truth. And that's why there's these things.

That's why we can recognize, that's why we can discover, that's why we can figure out how things work, that's how we can dig and learn and dig and learn, and we can be engineers and physicists and chemists and biologists and moms and dads and dancers and poets and artists and carpenters and have families, and we can do all these things, and there's this coherence there.

[33 : 34] And the same one who's created all things and we recognize that there is this fundamental problem and it's not a problem with Islam. It's not a problem with atheism. It's not a problem with totalitarianism.

It's not a problem with Buddhism or Hinduism or Christianity. That the fact of the matter is that every day in the newspaper it convinces us that there's something fundamentally wrong with human beings that human beings cannot fix for themselves.

I just watched on DVD The Giver. And as soon as you see a perfect society in any Hollywood movie, what do we all know? There's evil.

It's evil masquerading is good. Everybody knows that. Except when we take psychology and spirituality and then we forget it. But the Bible never forgets it and it goes after the heart and it's saying that the same God who creates all things is the God who comes and is amongst us in lowliness and he comes to die.

And by telling us that, the Bible is telling us that the problem of human beings is vastly worse than we can possibly imagine and believe. But the worth of human beings is vastly greater.

[34 : 47] that God, the Son of God, would die upon a cross so that we could be reconciled to him. One of the most famous verses in the Bible, John 3.16, For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Spoken by God, the Creator, who walks amongst us, who died upon the cross to redeem us, to reconcile us to him. Andrew, if you could put up the final slide.

I'm going to invite, this will be up on the webpage later, I'm going to invite you that this is a great prayer. It's a prayer to begin the Christian walk. It's a prayer to live the Christian walk. Dear God, please grow in me a humble, trusting, walking knowledge of the greatness, glory, and grace of Jesus, the crucified Messiah.

At whose birth we celebrate, Jesus the Messiah. And it's to be a humble, to grow in us a humble trusting of the greatness, glory, and grace of Jesus, the crucified Messiah.

Humble trust. Walking means that it makes a difference about how we live. You know, the mission statement of this church is making disciples gripped by the gospel, living for his glory. That as the gospel grips us, it will change how we live our 24-7 lives.

[36 : 14] And I try to capture that in the word walking. If the Holy Spirit has it all pressed upon you, would you join me in praying that? Could you stand? Please? And we'll just allow a moment of silence.

And you don't have to pray it out loud, but if the Holy Spirit is pressed upon your heart at all, the glory and the greatness of Jesus, God, the Son of God, the Word, who was with the Father before all eternity, who became flesh, to die upon the cross, so that all who believe and trust in him will not perish, will not perish, but have eternal life with the Father who has created all things and will make the new heaven and the new earth for us to dwell in.

And not just to know and trust Jesus, but to know and trust Jesus is to enter into a relationship where we walk with him. He guides us. He'll change how we live our lives. The prayer to enter the Christian walk is the prayer to continue and grow and deepen in the Christian walk.

So those for whom the Holy Spirit is pressed upon you, please join with me in praying. Dear God, please grow in me a humble, trusting, walking knowledge of the greatness, glory, and grace of Jesus, the crucified Messiah.

Father, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. Bring us to Jesus. Help us to trust, Father, that all truth is your truth. Help us, Father, to press in to know more of Jesus and to know more of the truth and to know more of you and to know more of your word and have your word play a deeper role in us.

[37 : 53] And all this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.