

# Why I am a Christian (1): The World

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 24 March 2024

Preacher: Colin Dow

[ 0 : 0 0 ] why am I a Christian? Me. One might answer because I was born in a Christian country and raised in a Christian family. Now, both to one extent or another are partly true, but there are many others in the same position as I was who are not Christians. So, this can't be the whole truth.

There are many others who were brought up in a Christian country and raised in a Christian family who have turned their backs on Christianity, so more must be involved in my persuasion.

I became a Christian at the age of 15, and if you asked me then why I was becoming a Christian, I'd have told you a very simple story. In fact, the best story, that I knew I was a sinner in need of forgiveness, that Jesus had died on the cross to take away all my sin, so I asked him to forgive me, and I committed my life to him. That's the simple story of my conversion to Christianity, and it's common to many of us, if not most of us, here today. But in the years since, I have become more convinced than ever that the Christian worldview and the Christian worldview alone provides a satisfactory explanation for the world as we experience it. I've become more convinced of the truths I learned in seed form that day I became a Christian. I've become more convinced than ever that if you ask me, why are you a Christian, Colin? I'd have to honestly answer that before I ever loved Jesus, he loved me, and it was all of his sovereign grace and mercy.

However, on my part, I am a Christian today because of six world-changing realities. The world, the word, the Christ, the resurrection, the gospel, and the future. Over the next six Sundays, I want to explain why each of these realities have shaped my life and how, if you admit them to be true, they can change yours also. Who knows, perhaps in years to come, someone who's present here today will preach their own series of sermons on why they're a Christian because on the 24th of March, 2024, they too began to follow Jesus for themselves.

This morning, from these verses in Psalm 19, verses 1 through 6, I want to present the first reason I'm a Christian, the world, the world. Now, this may not surprise you, given that in a previous life, I was a research and development scientist who spent his PhD and his working life exploring the physical intricacies and mathematical order of our world. It may surprise you to know that there are a higher percentage of scientists who are believing Christians than any other profession.

[ 3 : 2 6 ] I've taken to watching Midsummer Murders on TV. It's driving Kathmer mad. It's tongue-in-cheek, even though it does have murders in its title. On one episode I watched a few weeks ago, Inspector Barnaby asked the pathologist whether she believed in God. She responded, I'm a rationalist, therefore I'm an atheist. I'd have to respectfully disagree with her and say, I'm a rationalist, therefore I am a Christian. As we look at the world around us, nothing else other than the Christian message satisfactorily explains what we see. Psalm 19, verses 1 through 6, provide us with two key truths about the world in which we live. First, this is a created world.

And second, this is a speaking world. Created world, speaking world. The heavens declare the glory of God.

That's the first reason I'm a Christian today. This is a created world. This is a created world, first of all. King David lived in the Bronze Age nearly 3,000 years ago, sings, The heavens declare the glory of God. The sky proclaims the work of His hands.

David's telling us that the universe in which we live is the work of God's hands. The Greek language into which the psalm was translated in the 2nd, 3rd century BC tells us, literally, the sky is the poetry of the hands of God. This universe is God's poem created by His hands.

It's His work of art. The whole cosmos, everything within it, it's God's work. But surely we've progressed as a society since then. Our science, our philosophy are far more advanced than that of David. We can talk about Higgs bosons and Big Bangs. We've gone past Newtonian laws and extended them to quantum mechanics. We no longer have a need to explain this vast universe in terms of God. But at its most basic level, there are only three options as to how this universe came into being. Or to put it another way, three options as to where this universe came from.

[ 6 : 17 ]     The first is that before anything existed, there was nothing. Nothing. There was no mind. There was no matter. Simply the nothingness of non-being. Since the first philosophers began to wrestle with this option, they came up with a memorable Latin phrase. We've already heard one this morning.

Ex nihilo nihil fit. Out of nothing, nothing comes. Out of nothing, nothing comes. How can something come from nothing? Bear in mind, the nothing to which we're referring means no natural laws, no matter, no energy, no information, nothing at all. And they said, out of nothing, nothing comes.

Let's think about it in this worldview. Out of nothing comes the great artworks of the world, the great stories of literature, the great scientific and medical endeavors, all the languages, all the cultures of humanity. The atheist's irrational answer is, it all came from nothing.

More than any of that, more than any of that, the passion with which I love my wife and my children, the loyalty I feel toward my family and my friends, the pain I feel at all the injustices of the world, and especially the grief I feel at the loss of a loved one, it all came from nothing.

Does that position really satisfy? That before the universe existed, before the stars began to shine, there was nothing? Out of nothing, nothing comes.

[ 8 : 12 ]     The second position is that before the universe existed, there was something. There was something.

It wasn't necessarily the same as our universe, but it consisted of matter, law, and energy. From that pre-existent something came everything we see and experience in our world today.

Whatever that something was, it sure was very smart. Furthermore, whatever that something was, it was eternal, without beginning and without end. Now, there are two outstanding problems with that position. The first is religious. If the universe came from something we know not what, then why not worship that something? Worship the sun and the moon and the stars, but more than that, worship what came before them. The something we know nothing about.

The second problem with it is scientific. Even if we don't accept the Genesis 1 account of creation, and many of us here do, everything in secular scientific literature will tell you that this universe did have a beginning at a point they call the Big Bang. Before the Big Bang, there was no matter, no energy to go bang. There is a considerable body of scientific evidence to back up that claim.

So again, the idea that before the universe existed, there was something falls flat. The third option as to where this universe came from is that which we read in Genesis 1 verse 1, in the beginning, in the beginning, God. Well, as we read in Psalm 19 verse 1, the sky above proclaims the work of his hands.

[10:16] In this option, God, infinitely loving, wise, inventive, and powerful, created everything we see and everything we experience. He created the rings of Saturn and the horsehead nebula. He created the vast array of species we see in the Amazon rainforest. He created the laws of mathematics and the laws of physics. Our human cultures are an expression of his beauty and diversity. It seems to me that only this third option has the power to satisfactorily explain why I can love my wife and family the way I do, because God created me to love and to be loved. Only this option can satisfactorily explain why the universe follows mechanical and quantum laws of predictability, and why we can play our cellos and find pleasure in the sounds they make, or why we can engage in the scientific endeavor, or why we find acts of human altruism such as medicine so satisfying.

Let's place these three options, the universe came from nothing, from something, or from God beside each other and think through them. The first is a counsel of despair. The second is a counsel of ignorance.

Only in the third do we find the satisfactory explanation of the universe as it is. That's why when I look up into the sky in a clear night, I don't just see stars and planets, but the poetry of the hands of God, His creative power at work, and I praise Him for it.

I remember during my PhD in Aberdeen looking at the screen of a transmission electron microscope, these things are probably out of fashion these days, at an obscure, incredibly rare crystal, which beforehand had never been identified by science. I discovered it, and I named it, isn't this pathetic, catamarite. But I didn't create it. I only discovered it. God made it. There remain millions of crystals which are not yet known to science. God made every one of them.

As a Christian, the deeper down into the scientific endeavor I went, the more convinced I became that we live in a universe and a world created by God, and that the words of Genesis 1 verse 1 hold satisfactory power to explain it all in the beginning God. This is a created world which means that behind every star, behind every natural ecosystem, behind every culture is the creative power of God.

[13:25] Don't let's worship these created things. Let's worship their Creator. Don't let's fear His creation. Let's explore it. Let's explore it. Let's steward it. Let's find pleasure in it. Smile at the stars.

Rejoice at the planets. And praise God saying, it's all the work of your hands. This is a created world. But this is also a speaking world. It's a speaking world. There is no such thing in this created universe. A silence. Only in a vacuum where there's no matter or energy can there be silence. Scientists using extremely sensitive listening devices pick up all kinds of noises from space. Wherever we are on planet Earth, there is always sound, even if we can't hear it ourselves.

Worms are always digging underground. Birds are always flapping in the air and the sea is always in motion. We live actually in rather a noisy world. But if we listen carefully, we can hear the universe speaking not in random sound, but in words we intuitively understand as human beings.

I am the work of God's hands. I am the work of God's hands and I exist to declare His glory. The universe declares something. It proclaims something. It pours forth speech. It reveals knowledge. This is a speaking universe which, if we listen carefully, we have confirmed to us the creative and loving power of God. The question is this. Are we listening deeper than sounds we hear with our ears or radio signals picked up from deep space? We spend billions on projects like SETI, trying to find patterns in extraterrestrial intelligence. But are we listening to what the created universe is telling us about God? There's three aspects of this being a speaking world from this psalm I want us to review together. It speaks with no words. It speaks with no end. And it speaks with our nature. It speaks, first of all, with no words. Verse 3 makes very curious reading. There's no speech, nor are there words whose voice is not heard. No matter how hard we try, you can't hear a voice in the sky, nor is any language written across the stars that it may be read. Imagine something speaking, but there's no words. Yes, but even by human analogy, the things like this are possible. You don't need words to express pain or grief. You don't need words to express joy or delight. All these things are written in our faces. In fact, words sometimes get in the way of the things we want to say.

And in the same way, the universe speaks with no words. That's a good thing because as we read in the next verse, their voice goes out throughout all the earth and their words to the end of the world.

[ 16 : 53 ] The words of the universe aren't expressed in any human language form such that we may read them in the sky. We're not going to get a plane flying low in the sky above Crow Road behind which is a banner written, God made the universe. We're going to get something better because the universe speaks and its words aren't limited to one language such that it speaks English and not Chinese. Rather, its voice is solidly powerful and therefore universal in scope. But many will say to us, we can't see God with our eyes and we can't hear God with our ears. Nor from Psalm 19 should we expect to hear God from the universe in which we live. Nevertheless, the universe still speaks not with words but with expressions of createdness, beauty, vastness, order. The sky does not write scientific or religious books, but it declares with greater power still the existence and the power of God. The question is this, are we listening?

It speaks with no words. Second, it speaks with no end. It speaks with no end. David uses the illustration of the sun every day rising in the east and setting in the west, this vast fireball in the sky that gives heat and light to everything and everyone on earth. He writes, there is nothing hidden from its heat to remind us of the universal nature of God's revealing of Himself in the world.

But he also uses it to remind us that the universe speaks with no end about God. It spoke to David and he heard it declaring the glory of God 3,000 years ago. It spoke to the Jesus who told stories about the lilies of the field and the rains that fall from the sky. It speaks to us today.

It does not stop talking. And that's one reason why today's scientific advancements speak more powerfully about God than they ever have before. Albert Einstein once said, the only incomprehensible thing about the universe is that we can comprehend it. Since the days of David, the human race has discovered many of the foundational laws undergirding the natural world, the laws of physics, mathematics, and culture. The universe in which we live is comprehensible. We can understand it. It's ordered. It's predictable. But only because its creator is ordered and predictable.

The English physicist Paul Dirac said something to which I don't think we give enough thought. He said, if a mathematical equation is not beautifully symmetrical, it is almost certainly incorrect.

[ 20 : 25 ] There's not merely an inherent order in the universe, but it's a beautiful order. The creative poetry of the hands of God. The universe speaks to us about God and declares to us His glory. It always has, and it always will.

And again, the question is, are we listening? But then third, and perhaps most important of all about the universe speaking to us, it speaks with our nature. It speaks with our nature. There's something within, deep within the heart of every human being which instinctively knows that there's a God.

The writer of Ecclesiastes knew this when he wrote, He, God, has put eternity in our hearts. There are no genuine atheists, because in the heart of every man is what John Calvin called the seed of divinity. The intuitive knowledge that there is a God who speaks and to whom we're all accountable. Our nature is rather like a lock, and the universe is like the key. What the universe declares agrees with what our hearts tell us. We don't need to be scientists to understand this.

All we need to be is human beings. The seed of divinity is part of what it means to be a human being. The Apostle Paul builds on this argument in Romans chapter 1 when he says about the truth of God that since what can be known about God is evident among us, God has shown it to us. For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world. In other words, in our heart of hearts, as human beings, we clearly see the glory of God in the work of his hands. It is evident to us because God has shown it to us. The existence of such a seed of divinity in our hearts is evidenced by their not being a people in the world who do not in some way or other search for him or worship him in the guise of some religion or other. Because there's something within us as human beings which wants to respond to the wonder and the beauty of the universe with praise to a higher being. Even the atheist opens his mouth in wonder at a glorious sunset in the Scottish mountains. But for some reason or another, he doesn't praise the God who made it all. He doesn't do anything with that sense of spiritual wonder. How satisfying it is to allow that seed of divinity within our hearts to blossom by attributing all this order and beauty to the one true and living God who made it all for his glory.

The universe is a preacher of God's glory and his divine attributes, if we will but listen. The human heart is unlocked by this universe and wants to direct its praise to him.

[ 23 : 59 ] This is the Christian worldview which enriches our science, our culture, our music, our physics, our language, and our medicine with such satisfying pleasure and meaning.

The question is this, if the universe is speaking and declaring the glory of God, why aren't we listening? Why aren't we listening? It is because in Paul's words in Romans, we suppress the truth in unrighteousness. We suppress the truth in unrighteousness. The world in which we live is beautifully ordered, but it can also be highly dangerous. The same God who created the heat of the sun created the fang of the serpent. The ultimate answer to why we aren't listening consists in something which God did not create, unrighteousness. Think of a bottle of champagne and the enormous pressure contained by the cork at the top. If the cork is released, the champagne explodes.

Our unrighteousness and sin are like the cork on a bottle of champagne. We suppress and hold down the truth. The universe declares we don't believe in God because we don't want to believe in God.

And even if we do believe in God, we believe in the wrong things. And it's all because of this one thing, unrighteousness. Something's damaged us and the world God made. It's our sin and unrighteousness.

I don't want to steal the thunder of future sermons on the topic of why I'm a Christian, but even from this perspective, from who and what we are, from the harmful effects of our universe upon us. We see our need, do we not, of forgiveness and recreation. We want to be truly human so as to allow the seed of divinity within us to blossom and recognize the glory of God and the poetry of His hands. We want to be at one, not just with the created universe, but with its Creator.

[ 26 : 09 ] In Colossians chapter 1, the apostle writes, By Him, that is Jesus Christ, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, all things were created through Him and for Him. We cannot understand our universe without reference to the Jesus by whom, through whom, and for whom everything was created. Does this not make it all the more amazing that the Jesus who set the stars in space and created the many moons of Jupiter became a man like us? It makes it all the more amazing that this Jesus, the creator of all things, through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave, became our Savior.

And that is ultimately why I'm a Christian. Not just because of the beauty and order of the world in which we live, but because Jesus Christ, by whom and through whom and for whom it was all created, gave Himself on the cross to take away all our unrighteousness and sin and to promise forgiveness, transformation, and cosmic recreation.

And I want to ask you to view the universe this way, as the theater of the glory of God and the scene of Christ's saving grace.

Today, will you take the step many of us have made and have never regretted, of placing your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, the Jesus by whom, through whom, and for whom, all things were created? That'll make us truly human, made as God intended us to be, with the seed of divinity unlocking the glory of God in His universe.

Will you today, now even? Why am I a Christian? Because of the world.