

The No Name Brand

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: 13 June 1993

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Thank you for reading, John. The reason I call this the no-name brand is because almost the whole of the experience of Psalm 104 doesn't define anything very much in terms of who God is.

It defines him almost totally in terms of his creation. And you know how there is such a thing as a no-name brand, and there's a great desire for no-name brand religion in our society so that people can believe whatever they like as to where it comes from as long as they get the goods. Well, I want to talk to you about this because you have the interesting problem set forth here, which I delight in, I must say. And that is that the whole of the world shares involvement in creation. It doesn't matter what religion you are or where your geography is or anything like that. You all share in the experience of creation.

Now, the church, which of course begins with the New Testament, has got itself into the business of redemption through faith in Jesus Christ and how by the resurrection God has begun a new creation.

[1 : 39] And so that the church tends to be fairly negligent of the old creation. But the old creation provides, in a sense, the common ground on which all of us can talk to all of us because we all share in our dependency upon it.

Now, the interesting thing about Psalm 104 is that they can trace in the words of this psalm, just if you look at that passage that you have in front of you, that section, the second paragraph particularly, the moon marks off the seasons, the sun knows when to go down, you bring darkness, it becomes light, all the beasts of the forest prowl, the lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God.

The sun rises and they steal away, they return to lie down in their den. And the man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening. And that was the part of an ancient Egyptian poem written, they believe, in the fourth century when there was a kind of religious revival in Egypt that some of you no doubt have heard from, heard about when they talk about Akhenaten and his centralizing the whole massive religion of Israel around a kind of monotheistic concept of the sun.

So you have this ancient sort of poem about creation, the sun, the moon, the cycles of the seasons and all these various things.

It goes back 14 centuries before Christ and it talks about it. Now, at that point, you see, the interesting thing is that the sun was in a sense the represented God and the sun was central to and universal to the whole of human experience and the whole of the sustaining of life on earth was due to the sun.

[4 : 01] But look at the second verse, the second line of that second paragraph and you see an interesting statement there which is an adaptation of the ancient Egyptian poem and it says, the sun knows when to go down.

So that in a sense, this is a put down of the sun. The sun is not in charge, the sun does what it's told. And so what this poem is, is, I mean, it doesn't lend itself perhaps to no-name brand, but what this poem is, is to say that you cannot separate the creation from the creator.

They are so interlocked that you can't make a separation. And that's what happened in ancient Egypt was that they were able to see the creation as self-sustaining, self-empowering, and that kind of thinking is very prevalent in a lot of the New Age thinking in our society at the moment, that we find God within ourselves.

We find God within creation. We find God in the whole dynamic process of the existence of material things. So this poem written or put together in the many centuries before Christ tells you something about the fact that, I mean, it contends that you can't separate the creation from the creator.

And that's part of the poem. Another part of the poem which intrigues me is that in my fantasy world, the time when I feel most delighted in being a human being, the thing I dream about and never realize is getting on a horse and riding to the western horizon in my cowboy boots and my cowboy hat and singing, old pal and me, we're going to be there by sundown.

[6 : 19] Anyway, and that is surely a profound picture of our very profound relationship to the creation.

You see in this story too that what God does when he makes the earth on its foundation, he makes the spring waters pour into their ravines.

In the Fuller text, and this is a ruthlessly abridged edition to get it onto this page, in the Fuller text, it talks about the sea and how the boundaries are set to the sea.

And it occurred to me as I was reading that, you know, that the sea has its limits and very often its limits happen to be a long shore, a long beach of sand. And frustrated as it may be, the sea pounds in and in and in and never is able to move the sand.

It's still there and it still contains the sea. But one of the delightful things about the tourist business is that mostly they advertise the joy of walking at that point where the beach and the sea meet.

[7 : 50] You know, that that's considered to be a kind of idyllic enjoyment of the whole of creation. So you get, you get this, this poem which talks about it.

Just look at it for a moment. The first thing that it says, praise the Lord, O my soul, O Lord, my God, you are very great. You are clothed with splendor and majesty.

So that there is an exaltation of God. And then it says, you are to praise the Lord, O my soul.

Now that's something that, you know, it comes in the things. But what it's saying and what's picked up from that is that the highest activity of any human being is to be totally consumed in the worship of God.

That's what your life is all about. You know. There you are. You know, there are certain restraints that some denominations use.

[8 : 54] But I, uh... But the implication is that emotionally and mentally and rationally and physically and in concert with the whole of creation, you give yourself utterly and entirely to the worship of God.

At the deepest level of your communication with yourself, you say, praise my whole being, uh, the God, uh, the God of creation.

Praise my soul, the King of Heaven. So that, that, that is, and I think you need to understand that, that for the, out of the heart of the Old Testament, comes that this is what man is.

The rest of creation just does its thing. But, uh, human beings gather together for that purpose of giving praise to God.

And that's why I think the church is in trouble because they, uh, they think it's a place to get entertained or to get, uh, intellectually challenged or to get emotionally stirred up or to quietly weep.

[10 : 14] Uh, one of their, I mean, people go to church for all these reasons. But, uh, the fundamental thing is that you could join with other people in giving yourself entirely to the worship of God.

The organist sometimes takes over and does it for you, but, uh, you can always carry a gun and shoot him if he gets out of hand. I, I, I, but, uh, it's, uh, and, uh, that's, I, I think you need to have that picture, uh, as, as you begin this psalm.

And then you see he gives this description of who God is when he wraps himself in light, makes the earth on its foundations, brings forth water, uh, he makes grass grow for cattle, he looks at the earth and it trembles.

In other words, the whole of creation trembles before its creator. You know, that we, we tend to treat religion as one of the products of creation.

But, uh, what this psalm does is say, no, uh, creation is the product of a God whom we are called within creation to lead in the worship of.

[11 : 35] So that architecture and music and everything that we do humanly should, in a sense, be part of the worship of God.

Praise my soul. Praise the Lord, O my soul. That's the thing that we are essentially doing. That is what is at the heart of our life. That is the deepest level of conversation with yourself that you can have.

You talk to yourself and you say to yourself, my soul, the job that you are given to do above everything else is to praise the Lord because he is Lord and he is the creator. And then it describes how he has put the whole thing together. And then it shows what it means to belong to the various sort of cycles of nature.

The moon marks off the seasons and we have the delight of the seasons and the warmth of a sunny day in downtown Vancouver. The sun knows when to go down because it is obedient to the creator.

[12:42] You bring darkness and it becomes light. And that simply means that, I mean, I think what it means is that your eyes get used to it. And there are certain people who see better in the dark than they do in the daylight.

and all the beasts of the forest powell, you get that sense that you, you know, if you're out moose hunting or out canoeing or out fishing or out on an African safari or something, once the sun goes, you go too because you're no longer in control after dark falls.

There's another world comes onto the stage of beasts and animals and the whole cycle of nature and the whole business of the night and the renewing thing of the night happens and you desert the world and somebody else takes over.

The lions roar for their prey. They seek their food from God. The sun, when the sun rises, they steal away. They return and lie down in their dens.

And then, as part of this whole cycle of creation, the man gets up, pours himself a cup of coffee, gets in his car, gets downtown, and time to read the first slip of the stock market report when it comes in at seven o'clock.

[14:02] So you have that kind of cycle of which we are very much a part. And one of the reasons that we look forward to summer holidays is that our timing has got all out.

And we want to get back in touch with the seasons and in touch with day and night and light and darkness and all the joys and delights of being more intimately involved in the process of creation. So we hike and we camp and we canoe and do all those kinds of things to try and get our timing straight again and to try and get in touch. But then in the next paragraph it says, then, these all look to you to give them their food at the proper time.

When you give it to them, they gather it up. When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your faith, they are terrified. When you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.

When you send your spirit, they are created and you renew the face of the earth. It's a very powerful picture that our life is given to us at the hand of God as he raises us from the dust and in his own sovereign purpose he returns us to the dust.

[15:23] We have life as he, taking Adam out of the dust, breathes into his nostrils the breath of life. And as that breath comes in, you have life and when that breath goes out, life is over.

But it's seen as part of God's creation and God's order and you accept it on those terms. You see, the whole, what is happening in this paragraph is that there is a kind of an immediacy of our dependence upon God.

It's, part of it that isn't here, which is a kind of particular delight is, it comes after, well, it's in verse 15.

It talks about how we, at the hand of God, receive the wine that gladdens the heart of man. I don't know if that's justification for a glass of sherry when you get home at night.

But it does suggest that the kind of morale of our humanity, our physical nature, needs a boost.

[16:46] And that wine is given as a gift of God and to be received as a gift of God. And the New Testament comes along and says, and it's not to be an alternative to the gift of God.

That's part of it. And then it goes on to say that there is oil to make your face shine. And that's really the basis of the whole cosmetic industry.

The shining countenance. And then it talks about the bread to sustain your heart and the necessity we have.

And that wine, oil, and bread are provided for us and we live with a sense of immediate dependency upon God.

Which of course has to be restored to us because we tend to think our life is dependent upon Safeways being open from 8 in the morning until midnight. we don't have to think any more about it than that.

[17 : 52] But he's saying that indeed you do have to think a great deal more about it than that. Then he goes on and says that man is to live by a sense of immediate dependence upon God.

So that his ultimate business is to worship God. He accepts the fact that he is in the order of the creation of God and the cycle of seasons that his breath is given to him that his food is given to him that he's raised from the dust and returns to the dust.

All that is part of it. He ends that by saying when you send your spirit that is creation and you renew the face of the earth.

So that this constant process of renewal is something that we identify with. Now, you know how we've become very environmentally conscious and but there's a connection I think between praise the Lord oh my soul and all that is within me praise his holy name.

There's a connection between that which is renewing to us the experience of worship is the most powerfully renewing experience that human beings can have in the course of their life that in that renewal and in that sustaining power God does this business of renewal.

[19 : 31] We praise him we acknowledge our continuing dependence upon him. now I don't quite know how to deal with this question because it bothers me very much.

I'm in a unique position of not having to go to church and you know because I it's unique in a sense that I've never had any choice about it before you just turn up on Sunday morning to do your thing but and just in a sense the duties and responsibilities of my religious life were laid on me because of my job and that reading the Bible and praying and talking to people and all those kinds of things were part of my life and now I spend quite a lot more time alone and I'm very much aware of the fact that how do you maintain that continuing relationship to God without the continual support of the structure of church discipline you know I can understand why people go into monasteries and things but I don't

I for them at the heart of it for me is that somehow there seems to be clearly taught that in relationship to the whole of creation there is the grounds for a continual offering of praise and thanksgiving to God a continual acknowledgement of submission to and dependence upon him which has nothing to do whether you're structurally or institutionally involved in the church it has to do with the fact that you're breathing and drinking and eating and participating in the whole of God's creation and that somehow that should be the motive and the inspiration that's all you should need in a sense to maintain on a continuing 24 hour a day 7 day a week basis fellowship with God but of course we live in a society in which you know in which the major industry is to distract us from what life's all about and we submit to a million distractions a day and then find ourselves you know at the end of the day saying

God where have you been and God saying I might ask you the same question you know that that that that that sense of being cut off so that you get that you get that to my to my way of thinking that that there is a thousand reminders of God's grace and of God's goodness and of our dependence upon him and his renewing of us so I I think about that and wonder about it and and then I think about this statement about how we have in some way messed up our relationship to the whole order of nature I'll read it to you without telling you where it's from and you you'll recognize it I'm sure but ever since God created the world his everlasting power and deity however invisible has been there for the mind to see in the things that he has made that is why such people are without excuse they knew

God and yet refused to honor him as God or to thank him instead they made nonsense out of logic their empty minds were dark the more they called themselves philosophers the more stupid they grew until they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for a worthless imitation for the image of mortal man or birds or quadrupeds or reptiles that is why God left them to their filthy enjoyment and the practices with which they dishonor their own bodies since they have given up divine truth for a lie and have worshipped and served the creature instead of the creator who is blessed forever this is why God has abandoned them to degrading passions why their women have turned from natural intercourse to unnatural practices why their men folk have given up natural intercourse to be consumed with passion for each other men doing shameless things with men and getting an appropriate reward for their perversion well what he's saying in effect and you can see the implications of this are not a bit disturbing but there they are and I just read them to you they were written 2000 years ago they weren't it wasn't written as a description of

[24 : 52] Vancouver 1993 or anything it's been there for a long time but what it is saying is that when we lose that connection with God our creator and sustainer the evidence of whose care

and provision and renewing power is around us all the time when we lose that then the whole thing goes wrong and every relationship becomes undermined and perverse and every good gift tends to be used for the wrong thing so you end up and I will end up with this too but you end up with this situation that that we have in our rebellion and in our stubbornness rather than live in fellowship and in communion with God in creation that that isn't the universal problem the universal problem is that we have universally rejected that and that somehow we have to be reconciled to the God who has created us and the work of reconciliation is what

Jesus Christ has done in a sense by becoming you mean the ultimate perversity of humankind is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ the triumph of the grace and mercy of God is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that he begins again a new creation and he calls us back to him and lays the grounds for our forgiveness our reconciliation our pardon and that we may come back into that relationship where with all our hearts and all our minds the central reality of our life may be summed up in the conversation we have with ourselves when we say praise the Lord oh my soul or as this as this passage ends and you look at it at the bottom of your page

I will sing to the Lord all my life I will sing praise to my God as long as I live may my meditation be pleasing to him as I rejoice in the Lord praise the Lord oh my soul to be set free to do that again is what God has done for us in Christ so that the whole of creation needs a signature somewhere the God of creation has got to write his name in the corner of history so we know who he is and the God of creation has done that in the cross of Christ put his name to the whole of his creation let me pray our God and Father we rejoice and delight in the magnificence of the creation that surrounds us and every facet of we acknowledge our perversity that we have turned away from you and that we feel alienated even in the context of the loveliness of our world we feel our existential loneliness and that we are victims of your creation rather than children of your creation so our God help us to see the reconciling work that you are doing to bring us back into right relationship to one another in our families in our nations among nations to bring us back through the peace which is ours through Christ's death on the cross the shedding of his blood we ask this in his name amen■ to to