

Nature and the Power of God

Ben Clausen

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 19:1-6

SONGS: This Is My Father's World

How Great Thou Art

I Sing the Mighty Power of God

INTRODUCTION

Vastness of Universe

Carl Sagan wrote a book entitled Contact and a Hollywood movie was made from it. The first minute of the movie looks like a view from a satellite as it moves away from the earth, further and further ... beyond the moon, the sun, the planets, the solar system, the nearest star, the stars we can see with our un-aided eyes, the Milky Way galaxy, beyond the nearest galaxies and out to the edge of the universe. To get the distances into perspective, I think about the furthest distance that I have ever been from home.

o India - Traveling here to India took a total of about 18 hours in an airplane. Traveling at 1000km/hr, that would be about 18,000km. That seemed to me to be a long ways, and my wife thinks so as well.

o Moon - However, when we watched the video about Apollo 13, I noticed that it took 3 or 4 days at probably about 5000km/hr to get back from the moon 400,000 km away. That's a long ways, but not too far because it only takes light a little more than a second to travel that distance at 300,000km/second.

o Sun - At that amazing speed it still takes light 8 minutes to get here from the sun 93 million miles away.

o Solar System - The furthest any man-made satellite has traveled is out to the edge of the solar system, several billion kilometers away. The Voyager spacecraft launched in 1977 encountered Neptune in 1989. It had traveled for 12 years at about 40,000 km/hr. It was far enough away that

it took 4 hours for a radio signal (traveling at the same speed as visible light) to be sent back to earth. But this is still part of our solar system.

o Stars - The nearest star (alpha Centauri) is 10,000 times further away: or about 40 trillion kilometers. For these kinds of distances it is easier to just say how long it would take for light to travel that far, which in this case is about 4 years. For any of the nearby stars we can see with the unaided eye, light has been traveling for up to several hundred years.

o Milky Way - But these stars are only part of the Milky Way galaxy that extends out far enough that it takes light 100,000 years to reach us from stars on its edge.

o Galaxies - Beyond our own Milky Way galaxy are myriads of other galaxies. The most distant object visible to the unaided eye is one of these galaxies, called Andromeda, which is 2 million light years away. However, the Hubble Space Telescope is looking at objects that are more

than 1000 times further away than even the Andromeda galaxy. In kilometers that is about a trillion, trillion kilometers away, or a 1 with 24 zeroes after it.

Thinking of these vast distances, leaves me in awe as I read Isaiah's description of God in the 40th chapter (v.26):

Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

Speed of travel

How does God keep track of this vast universe? I have no idea.

o Desire of Ages (p.356) - God is in active communication with every part of His dominion through channels which we cannot discern.

o Daniel 9 - The angels must be able to travel pretty fast. In Daniel 9, the angel was apparently

able to fly from heaven to Daniel's side in about 3 minutes. That's faster than light, because it takes 8 minutes for light to reach us just from the sun.

Smallness of atom

Now the large sizes aren't the only area that God has control of.

o Hair - He says that even the hairs of our head are numbered.

o Cells - Now hair isn't very thick, but even so 100 human cells could be lined up across its thickness.

o Virus - These human cells are pretty small, but they could easily accommodate 100s of viruses within them.

o Atoms - These simple viruses are made up of 1000s of atoms.

o Protons - And even the atom is much larger than the protons inside it, since an atom is mostly empty space. If the protons inside the atom were scaled to be the size of a basket ball, the size of

the atom would be about the size of the Delhi area.

o Water Drop - Several years ago, my Dad read that there were more molecules of water in a water drop than there are people on the earth. He asked me if that could possibly be true. After a few calculations I told him that it was not only true, but that there were more molecules of water in a water drop than there are hairs on the heads of the people on the earth, a lot more. God keeps track of a lot of hair, but all of these molecules and atoms are under His control as well.

o Atomic Power - Inside these atoms is power that we have only begun to fathom during this century. These atoms don't have much mass, but if we multiply this small mass by the large value for the speed of light and then by the speed of light again, we get the amount of energy that is wrapped up in these small packages. This is from Einstein's famous equation, $E=mc^2$. A small amount of this energy is released when an atomic bomb or a hydrogen bomb is set off.

SCRIPTURE ON GOD IN NATURE

Wonders of the universe like these remind me of several texts in the Bible that speak of God's greatness:

o For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. (Isa 55:8)

o Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. (1 Cor 2:9)

o For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: (Rom 1:20)

Another place that talks about the wonders of creation is in the book of Job. After all the misery that Job went through, did God explain it all? NO! Instead God asked Job a lot of questions about nature. God let Job know that He was in control of all:

38:1 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, (2) Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? (3) Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

12 Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the dayspring to know his place;

16 Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? or hast thou walked in the search of the depth?

25 Who hath divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters, or a way for the lightning of thunder;

31 Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? (32) Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?

40:1 Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said, (2) Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it. (3) Then Job answered the Lord, and

said, (4) Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. (5) Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.

40 behemoth

41 leviathon

42:1 Then Job answer the Lord, and said, (2) I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden form thee. (3) Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. (4) Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. (5) I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.

TOO SMALL A MODEL OF GOD

I believe that our picture of God is too small.

You remember the Sadducees who came to Jesus with a question about the woman who married 7

brothers, one after another, as the previous one died. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, and thought this a good opportunity to show how difficult it is to believe in the resurrection. Jesus answer was simple: (Mt 22:29)

Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.

I remember as a child needing to memorize the 10 commandments. I think it was for Pathfinders - one of the progressive classes. I wished that it wasn't so long, and wondered why there needed to be the second commandment as well as the first. It seemed to me that they were both saying the same thing: Don't worship idols. It would have been simpler for me to memorize if God had just said that and left it as one commandment.

However, since then I have realized the importance of the second commandment as separate from the first. The first commandment says not to worship other gods besides the true God. The second commandment goes a step further and says to be

careful not even to worship human representations of the true God. In the Israelites day, these were idols. The Old Testament people wanted something they could see as a symbol of their God. This symbol however, would lower their conception of the true God. It would be easy to come to believe that the true God was no more than their representation of Him. God told them that they had not seen Him in the Mount, so they were to make no representation of Him. (Deut. 4:15-19)

In our day we have our representations of Him as well. Our limited pictures or ideas about Him, that are in our mind.

J.B.Phillips talks about this in his book: *Your God is Too Small* (1961) In this book he gives a number of examples of how humans have too limited a picture of what God is like:

- o Resident Policeman - but God is more than just our conscience

- o Parental Hangover - but He is not just a big version of our Dad

o Heavenly Bosom - but God is more than a security blanket

o God-in-a-Box - but God is more than what fits any one church's creed

Grand Old Man - one of my favorite, which goes like this:

Since God was around in OT times and even before, he must be very old. A nice old man, but not very up to date. He understood how the farmers in the OT thought, but wouldn't understand us very well today. Can you imagine Jesus sitting down to run a computer? Would he know how to fly a jet aircraft? Surely he would have trouble running a nuclear power plant. He would be fooled by all the high-tech special effects in today's video productions. Would he be able to fathom modern communication by FAX, Internet... Your initial reaction is, that is too high-tech for God, but then you realize that obviously He knows all about that.

So, yes, we have too small a picture of God. He is all-powerful, all-knowing. He is in control, from the

universe down to the atom. He can ask us questions as He did Job, and we will have to put our hand over our mouth: “Yes, You know how to do everything.”

WHAT IS GOD’S POWER?

We have seen a few simple examples of God’s greatness in nature. These will catch our attention as Romans 1 says, but interestingly enough, the essence of God’s power and greatness is elsewhere.

You remember when Elijah fled from Jezebel he spent 40 days at Mt. Horeb, at Sinai. Elijah must have remembered the stories about God’s great natural power manifested there when the Decalogue was given. God came and talked to Elijah there, and some pretty awesome natural events occurred again: a wind, an earthquake, and a fire. But God said that he wasn’t in these. Finally, where was God? - in a still small voice. (I Kings 19:11-12).

So, what is this power? It is power that can turn the world upside down. Paul says in Romans (1:16), that it is the gospel of Christ that is the power of God unto salvation. Unfortunately, he also notes “that in

the last days”, men will have “a form of godliness, but [deny] the power thereof: [and] from such turn away.” (I Tim. 3:5) It is the power of the gospel of Christ that changes lives, that people are looking for, and can so easily be replaced by a form.

Dreams of a Final Theory by Steven Weinberg.

1992 (Nobel Prize in physics)

The book describes what a final theory in physics would be like, and what form it might take. Near the end Weinberg has included a chapter entitled “What About God?” Would this final theory of everything include God?

Weinberg says that “the only way that any sort of science can proceed is to assume that there is no divine intervention” (p.247). And since science has been so successful when using this assumption, the assumption must be correct. As such “there is an incompatibility between the naturalistic theory of evolution and religion as generally understood” (p.248). Religion arose “in the hearts of those who longed for the continual intervention of an

interested God” (p.248).

Weinberg would like to believe in a designer, but that designer would also have to be responsible for suffering and evil (p.250). He would like to find evidence in nature of a concerned creator, but finds “sadness in doubting that we will” (p.256). He does not think “that science will ever provide the consolations that have been offered by religion in facing death” (p.260). Religion provides meaning and hope, but for those very reasons it seems “indelibly marked with the stamp of wishful thinking” (p.255).

My response is this: science has done well at mechanistically explaining the natural world, with a steadily diminishing need to invoke a god-of-the-gaps until its use has fallen into disrepute. But it has left humanity with a clock-work universe that provides nothing for the human spirit, and too rarely leads to belief in a personal God. Woe is the church if it provides no more than science for the basic needs of the human soul, if it too provides only rules, creeds, doctrines, and rites, if it doesn’t provide the concern of a friend or of a personal God

who cares.

The evil in the world can be explained philosophically by a God who made creatures with free-will so they could love, but when evil directly affects a person's life the only answer comes from a friend who can empathize, or a personal God who understands. A purpose in life requires the personal touch, making a difference in someone else's life.

Weinberg feels that personal need, but unfortunately does not see the solution in religion. Perhaps he has seen only the form of godliness, but not the power. The wonders of nature inspire awe, and that is good and important, but more is needed to give the power of the gospel of Christ, of a Person.

Witnessing

I visited Moscow several years ago to work on a nuclear physics experiment at an accelerator near there. In the process I made friends with a lady who, for many years, has worked as a theoretical nuclear physicist at Moscow State University, THE University in Moscow.

She has shown an interest in my faith on several occasions; has asked about the vegetable gardens that Zaoski Adventist Seminary was famous for; has attended an Adventist church in Moscow, and knows a little about our beliefs. When I ate with her and her student in her apartment, she always made sure I had herbal tea.

This last time I visited her, Dr. John Baldwin from the Andrews Seminary was along with me. During our conversation, she asked us about the problem of suffering. I was ready to tell her a little of the Great Controversy story, of God wanting free creatures to love him, of Lucifer choosing not to love, and the results. Before I could start however, she said, “I already know about the fallen angel.” But that didn’t satisfy her.

Thinking about it since then I have realized why not. Philosophy is fine for answering philosophical questions. That answer worked fine for me. What pain have I experienced? But for her who had lived through many years of communist oppression, and who even while I was there was struggling with how

to take care of her husband who had just had a heart attack, philosophy wasn't good enough. Her husband would not have had to have had a heart attack. The doctor's knew of his heart problem and the risk for a heart attack, but there was just no nitroglycerin available. Only when he had the attack, would they take him in the hospital and provide some treatment. What senseless suffering.

What she needed was not doctrines, but to know of a loving personal God, of a Christ who suffered along with us here on the earth, who knows our sorrows as well as our joys. She needed the personal touch of another who was hurting as she was. I couldn't give that! I hadn't had the experience.

CONCLUSION

I would like to close with the apostle John's beautiful introduction to his gospel. He describes God as the personal Christ:

... the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (v.14)

