

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on September 17, 2017 on Genesis 2:4-7 and Psalm 139:13-14 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Soul Searching

Today's Focus: Origin – Where Do We Come From?

“God Thinks You’re Somebody *Wonderfully Special!*”

- 1. Because he made you.**
- 2. Because he redeemed you.**

Two weeks ago I finally fell for it. I clicked on the ad for a free 14 day trial of ancestry.com. I figured I'd find out a little more about where I come from because I really don't know too much. Have any of you researched your genealogy? I've always been curious. I just didn't think I could find out very much. But boy was I wrong! Quickly I discovered that others had done a lot of research already and without too much trouble I was able to go back 5, 6, 7 generations and more in some branches of the Kuerth family tree. I learned among other things that my 5th great grandpa Kuerth married the daughter of a Mennonite Bishop whose family can trace their Swiss roots all the way back 500 years. Thoroughly fascinating...well to me maybe, probably not to you. Your family tree I'm sure is probably at least a little more interesting to you.

But you know what else is interesting? Animals don't care about any of this stuff. They don't think about their family tree. In fact a dog doesn't know it's a dog. A cat doesn't wonder why it's not a dog. While many animals have intelligence and memory storage but no animals sit around trying to develop a philosophy of life.

Yet we humans do. There are deeply rooted and almost irresistible longings uniquely inside human beings. We yearn to know answers to questions like: Where have I come from? Why am I here? What happens when I die? Is there a God out there? And if so, so what? Friends, these are worldview questions.

Everyone has a worldview. A worldview is like a set of lenses through which we perceive the world around us. It affects the decisions we make. And the thing is our worldview is formed by lots of things—most of which we're unaware. Our education, our upbringing, the culture we live in, the books we read, influential people in our lives, the media and movies we absorb, etc. For many people their worldview is simply something they have absorbed by osmosis from their surrounding cultural influences. They have never thought deeply about why they believe what they believe.

That's what we're going to do in this series *Soul Searching*. We're going to look at what we might call the Christian worldview – a worldview with God in the picture, and contrast it with what we might call the atheistic worldview – a worldview without God in the picture. We'll talk about some of the assumptions and implications of each.

Our source book for the Christian worldview is the Bible. If you're familiar with it you may know that while the Bible talks about some ways we can know there is a God, it doesn't set out to prove that there is a God. And so the Bible begins by simply telling us, **“In the beginning God created...”** (Gen. 1:1). And so we quickly come to this reality – the Christian worldview presupposes the existence of God. The assumption or starting point is that God exists. But no one should be bothered by this because an

atheist also has a presupposition. An atheist begins with an underlying assumption that likewise has far reaching implications for his or her worldview – there is no god. You see both statements, whether a Christian’s “There is a God” or an atheist’s “There is no god” are statements that you can’t prove or disprove. And because of this they’re both actually statements of *faith*. They’re beliefs.

So I want to talk briefly about the use of science and reason as we explore the idea of worldview because there are a lot of people today who will say that atheism is a worldview based on science and reason as opposed to Christianity which they think is a worldview based on faith. But as I mentioned they’re both really based on faith.

As a Christian I believe that science and reason are wonderful gifts of God. They are not opposed to the existence of God. Science is not the enemy of God. It’s just that science and reason have their limits and it’s important to recognize them. For example, Dr. Francis Collins is by all accounts a brilliant human being. He was the director of the Human Genome Project. He is presently still the Director of the National Institutes of Health. So Dr. Collins has studied human DNA in a systematic, expert level way. He was an atheist. Now he’s a Christian. He’s still a top-rate scientist. And so I think what he says about our topic is insightful, “Science is...a powerful way, indeed - to study the natural world. Science is not particularly effective...in making commentary about the supernatural world. Both worlds, for me, are quite real and quite important. They are investigated in different ways.”

So you understand what he’s saying? Science is effective at investigating the natural world. But that’s all it can do. All science can do is use reason observe and test and experiment within the natural world as it is right now. And that’s wonderful because we find that there are incredibly precise and predictable laws of nature. There is order evident everywhere. Smart humans can use our reason to figure out how the natural world works and so we can discover medicines and build airplanes and design iPhones and create apps like Candy Crush Soda (Ok not maybe not everything is a great use of human reason and intelligence!). But we can properly learn and do some wonderful things using science and reason to help our neighbor. And therefore becoming a scientist is a worthy vocation for a Christian to pursue. Go be a scientist to the glory of God!

But recognize the limits of science. It’s not equipped to investigate the supernatural realm. Science cannot devise an experiment or test to prove or disprove there is a God because even if it did, science is only capable of explaining things using natural causes. For example, someone could very make the case that it must be a divine miracle of God that my wife loves me the way she does. Yet science can only evaluate the chemistry of her brain and use human reason to try and explain why she loves me according to her dopamine neurotransmitters. But that’s not very satisfying explanation for the power of love that endures all things, is it? “Honey, I love you in so far as you make my dopamine neurotransmitters function” is not going to be a very fulfilling or particularly effective romantic strategy! Please don’t try it.

Maybe that’s why philosopher C. Stephen Evans says, “Science by its very nature is not fit to investigate whether there is more to reality than the natural world.” Combine this with the fact that no one was present at the beginning to observe the processes at work in creation and all we are left with this little phrase, “By faith.” This is true for both the atheist who says “There is no god” and for the Christian who believes that the phrase “By faith” finishes like this, **“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible”** (Hebrews 11:3).

The good news is that for this to happen we would need a Being who is eternal, powerful, and unfathomably intelligent. The very God that we in fact find as he reveals himself to us in the Bible! In Genesis chapter one we see the grand overview. Like a panoramic picture, God reveals how he created the heavens and the earth out of nothing through the power of his spoken word. In Genesis chapter two we zoom in and get the close up. We see that everything God made, he made to serve his most special creatures—the crown of all his creation—the objects of his special love—human beings that he put on a planet just perfectly designed for human life to thrive.

Why is this? Friends, it's because God thinks you're somebody wonderfully special! This is true, first of all because he made you. But of course if God didn't make you, if God doesn't exist even, then you're not really somebody wonderfully special. In fact you're not really somebody special at all. Now you heard Pastor Bill read before in Genesis chapter one that when God made human beings he said, **“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness”** (Gen. 1:26) and the text went on to say, **“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”** (Genesis 1:27). And this is mind blowing stuff!

First, maybe you noticed, because here's God talking about himself in the plural. This reminds us that our God is beyond our understanding. He is Triune. Meaning he is three persons in one God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And I don't know about you but I'm thankful that I can't understand God's being because I think for God to really be able to have all things in his control, to intimately know the details of my life, and to have both a plan and the power to work all things out towards a beautiful goal, the good and bad, taking into consideration all the free willed choices that human make, he has to be infinitely bigger than my tiny human brain can fathom! Exactly the God the Bible reveals to us.

But the truly amazing thing is that this Triune God made human beings “in his image.” He did not do this for any animal. Only of human beings, both man and woman, is it said that that we were made in God's image. What does this mean? It means that human beings originally had perfect knowledge of God as their loving Creator, perfect knowledge of God's will, and that they were perfectly holy – uncorrupted in their entire being with no sin or imperfection whatsoever. Think about it. They actively desired what God willed. They had an extraordinary intelligence to oversee all of creation. They weren't apes dragging their knuckles along the cave floor. But you know what happened, right? That perfect image of God was lost when Adam and Eve fell into sin so that all that was left is a shell of it. Our original holiness was gone replaced by the sin we inherit from our parents. Our intelligence darkened. Our reason corrupted. And all creation was caught up in this downward spiral away from God. Deterioration, death and destruction has marred our planet ever since. Finally we all die, even the strongest of us, when our soul separates from our body which returns to dust as we heard a couple Sundays ago in Ecclesiastes 12:7, **“the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it”**.

But this also tells us something else that's special about human beings, hinting at something else about God's plans for us. God gave us a soul! We read about this in the close-up of Genesis chapter 2:4-7...

4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. 5 Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground (In other words this is still before sin and any of its consequences impacted this world, before work become toil, before human beings had to eek out a living), **6 but streams came up from the earth and**

watered the whole surface of the ground. 7 Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Did you notice it – the special care God takes to form man from the dust of the ground? The Hebrew verb “to form” is the picture of a potter, an artist personally shaping the clay. Unlike how God made the animals he gives special attention to the crown of his creatures. And when he’s finished he breathes into him the breath of life. God gives human beings a soul.

Since this series is called *Soul Searching* we should probably define what a soul is. You ready? Every human being is uniquely made up of two parts—body and soul. The soul is the non-material part of a human being that gives life to the body; is immortal, i.e. lives on after death; it gives humans a rational ability; it enables humans to feel and express emotions; it gives us our personality; and when converted to faith in Jesus Christ can enter into spiritual communion with God. Our soul is what gives us the ability to be self-conscious and aware of our existence. Our soul is the reason we all have deep emotional needs and why we seek answers to questions like Where do I come from? Our soul is designed to only find its rest in the God who made it.

Now what happens if you don’t believe this? What are the implications if you don’t believe there is a God? This is important to think through. It’s why your worldview matters. Because if there is no God then you are just a cosmic accident. You are just the product of unguided natural processes of evolution over time. You are not a special creation. You are just a more or less highly developed animal. As such you have no intrinsic value, worth, or dignity of your own. Now of course this sounds ugly and harsh. That’s why hardly anybody can live happily thinking this way. That’s why just about everybody in our country, including many atheists, celebrate so-called basic human rights. That’s good. But what is it that made them basic human rights? Why does our nation’s birth certificate, the Declaration of Independence, call them “unalienable rights” that are “self evident”? Because of God who gave them to us at creation! That’s the only reason. They come from God. Drop God and what do you have? Eugenics. Nazi Germany. The view that a human life only has value when those have power give it value according to their views of superiority and inferiority.

I think Christian writer Greg Koukl is worth listening to when he says this: *“I do not want you to miss the simple arithmetic here: If man’s special value falls, then unalienable human rights fall, too. If man is not special, if he is not deeply different from any other thing, then there is no good reason not to treat him just like any other thing when it’s convenient for us to do so. If man is just “the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind,” ... then there is no good reason for unique and unalienable human rights. It should not be surprising, then, when cultures consistently believe that there is nothing special about being human, that soon they deny ultimate moral obligations and unalienable human rights too. When man is reduced to a mere animal—when the force of one’s worldview logic demotes humans to mere biological machines—morality and human rights die and power is all that remains. This has happened with every communist regime, and happens with all governments as they get increasing secular. It cannot be otherwise.”*

About a month ago I ran across a tweet from CBS news in my Twitter feed that was very positively saying that, in Iceland, Down syndrome is disappearing. The headline stated this very positively. So I clicked on the link to read the article and what I read disturbed me greatly. The point of the article wasn’t to say how they’re eliminating Down syndrome but rather how they are eliminating people with Down syndrome through abortion so that they are never born despite the fact that the very same article

says that “Many people born with Down syndrome can live full, healthy lives, with an average lifespan of around 60 years.”

Friends, worldview matters. Where you come from matters. Remember how I started out today by talking about tracing my ancestry? Well you know what? We all actually have a common ancestry that goes back to Adam and Eve. Think what would change if we embraced the fact that there is truly one race—the human race. That we are all God’s children from the moment of conception for in his mind he makes us wonderfully special. Friends, this is true also of you. There’s a Psalm that says poetically, **For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well** (Psalm 139:13-14).

Did you notice what the Psalmist is saying? Like seeing an ultrasound, Psalm 139:13 gives us a window into a mother’s womb. Who was it there in the womb—yet unborn and not yet fully formed? “Me” says the Psalmist. **You knit *me* together in my mother’s womb.**

This is an incredible thought, isn’t it? Already in my mother’s womb I was a unique, special, dearly loved creation of God. You were too. Already inside your mother’s womb that wasn’t just potential you. That was *you*. All the DNA that makes you uniquely special as a human person was already there in that first single cell made to rapidly multiply and divide, alive and growing. God thinks you’re somebody wonderfully special! First, because he made you. Second, because he redeemed you.

A world without God implies that your life only has value in so far as the government or those in power deem it so. That’s scary. But so that you could know how much God values you independent of any human authority Jesus Christ, true God from all eternity, willingly left behind the bliss of heaven and took on our human flesh and blood in that very moment when a single cell was knit together by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb. He didn’t come into this world as a dolphin or as a gorilla. He didn’t come into this world as a Martian or as a Vulcan or some mythical alien. He came as a human—body and soul. One of us. Jesus valued my life, your life, every single human life that much. The infinite Creator took upon himself the weakness of his creatures. Ultimately, he proved just how much God values each of us when he died for us all on the cross for all our sins that we might all live forever with him in heaven.

You see no matter what you think of yourself. No matter how you feel at any given moment. No matter what you think you’ve made of your life or what you might deeply regret. No matter what your spouse said in the past week. What matters now is that God thinks you’re somebody wonderfully special! First because he made you. Second, because he redeemed you. Through baptism he placed his name on you, washed away your sins, and said, “You’re mine. I will love you no matter what. One day you will discover what I’ve revealed in my holy Word all along: You are somebody wonderfully special.” Amen.