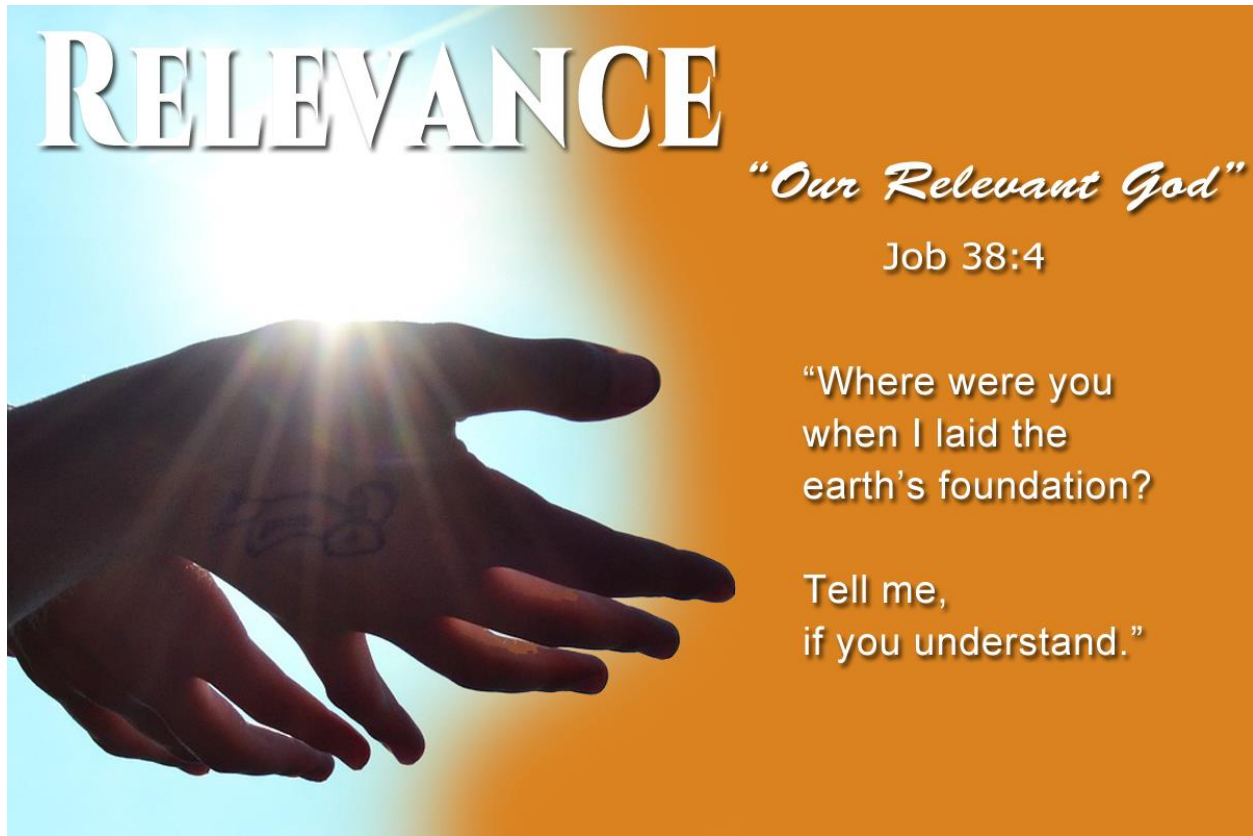


April 7

“Our Relevant God”



RELEVANCE

“Our Relevant God”

Job 38:4

“Where were you
when I laid the
earth’s foundation?
Tell me,
if you understand.”

Special Music: “Creation Calls”

Brian Doerksen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTsBBxTgdvg>

Job 38:4

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?

Tell me, if you understand.”

A Relevant Experience

Dusty pulled his cruiser into the shade of a tree near the creek off Broken Rock Rd. He rolled down all the windows and sat for a minute before opening the door and stepping out. A breeze was blowing, and the trees whispered in the Spring air. Walking a short distance, he sat down on the grass with his back against the old pin oak near the edge of the water. This was his favorite thinking spot. People seldom came down this way.

The creek was burbling after the recent rain which created the ideal setting for Dusty to gather his thoughts and worries. He didn't really care if the grass stained his deputy's uniform. He needed this time. It had been a rough night and even rougher day.

There were two deputies in Parable, TX, working under the direction of Sheriff Thom Ballard. Himself, Daniel Forrester (everyone called him Dusty), and Marsha Wagner. Marsha was supposed to be on call last night but had taken ill after eating something that didn't agree with her over at Daisy's Diner, so Dusty had needed to take a double shift that carried him over until the sheriff arrived.

Parable was usually a quiet place, but last night had been the exception. Dusty had been called to break up a fight at the Never Too Early Bar, which was on the outskirts of town, but still within the city limits. There had been no choice but to arrest Charlie Slater for drunk and disorderly conduct, something that he always hated to do. Charlie had a tendency to turn mean when he had a little too much to drink. Jesse (Jess Wiggins, the proprietor, a sweet lady but often a little

too lenient with her clientele), should have cut him off earlier. But she didn't. And Charlie had broken a pool cue over Randy Mendelson's shoulder when Randy had accidentally spilled his beer on Charlie when they were passing each other in the crowded bar. Dusty appreciated that Randy didn't press charges although he would certainly have understood if Randy had chosen to do so.

No sooner than he had gotten Charlie settled into a cell for a night, the phone rang to let him know that the Baxters (Amy and Phil) were at it again. Dusty had driven right over to find that Phil had gotten angry over some insignificant something and had lost his temper. In a fit of uncontrolled anger, he had thrown a kitchen chair through the window and some of the glass had cut Amy's arm deep enough that she would need stitches. She didn't want Phil arrested or detained. We all know how Phil can get to be a bit much at times and he really wasn't trying to hurt Amy. So, Dusty grabbed a towel from the linen closet and tied it around Amy's arm. He then called Doc Adams, waking him up, to let him know that he was bringing Amy over to get some stitches.

By the time the sun came up, Dusty was exhausted. Sheriff Thom sauntered into the office around 9 AM to relieve Dusty. Which was good because Dusty had a doctor's appointment at the clinic with the new doc, Patricia Danners. She was going to go over his recent bloodwork with him at 2:00 in the afternoon. He grabbed a few hours of sleep before he met up with Doc Danners. It was not a good visit.

“Dusty, your numbers are worse. You are not a well man. We are going to have to start you on some meds to deal with both your diabetes and your blood pressure.”

“But Doc. I’m only 38 years old. I hate to start taking meds for all this. No telling what it will do to me,” said Dusty.

“You really don’t have an option, deputy. You are going to take the meds. And you are going to have to start taking better care of yourself. You really need to cut back on your work hours and get more rest. You are not going to be any good to anyone if you keep going the way you are going. If you are going to stay relevant to the people around you, you are going to have to listen to me and do what you are told.”

So, here he sat, back against the tree, listening to the wind in the trees and the burbling brook, pondering the last 24 hours. He had never thought about his relevance to the people of Parable. Dusty had never married, but he thought of the townspeople as his family. He took care of them. Even when their own flesh and blood wouldn’t. He thought about Charlie sitting in a jail cell and about how Randy would probably need to go to the clinic about his shoulder. He thought about how frightened Amy must have been when Phil lost his temper. He even thought about having to wake up doc Adams to patch Amy up from that broken glass.

Yes, this hadn’t been a normal night in Parable. But he loved these people and felt closer to them than his own family back east. The water in the creek

continued to trickle past carrying with it a few leaves and grass. What does it mean to be relevant? And then he thought about the tree he was leaning against. That tree was relevant. He could count on that tree. The tree would always be there when he needed it. Maybe that was what relevance was all about. Maybe Doc Danners was right, that he, Dusty Forrester was relevant to the people of Parable, TX.

With that, Dusty stood up, shook the dirt and grass from his uniform, tipped his hat to the burbling creek, and made his way back to his cruiser. Yes, relevance was about being able to be counted on to do the right thing, at the right time, in the right place. To make a difference in the lives of the people around him. He said a short prayer to thank God for his thinking spot and for helping him to understand his relevance in the world around him. He had better learn to take better care of himself if he wanted to continue to be relevant.

I must admit that I admire the faith of the atheist. In preparation for this sermon, I struggled and researched to come up with a probability of the spontaneous immersion of the universe out of nothing. And, while many scientists adhere to this idea, the number is so astronomical that it makes no sense to even try to relate it to you. The odds are beyond our imagination, far higher than trying to find a single needle hidden within millions of haystacks. So, I tried to simplify the number by asking what the chances are that life, any life, single-cell amoeba life incapable of reproduction occurring by chance, just because conditions within a primordial soup were conducive to such things. And the numbers were even higher than a spontaneously combusted universe. Thinking that if I narrowed it down even further to get the odds of the singular development of intelligent life, I might possibly get a number that we could relate to. But such a number is even larger with so many zeros that it will fill more than all the pages in all the books ever printed.

So, I have to admire the faith of the atheist, who when faced with these impossible odds, still believes that it is the only answer in an effort to deny even the remotest possibility of intelligent design, that a greater mind than ours was the source of inspiration and creation of the fabric of the universe and the guiding force behind the development of humankind. That is faith, my friend. If we had a smidgen of such faith, we could change the world. What is it that Jesus tells us in Matthew 17?

Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

If we had the faith of an atheist, there is no telling what we could accomplish!

What makes God relevant in this chaotic world? Why do people have such a hard time believing in the relevance of God? I love this short verse by Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

**Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries,
And daub their natural faces unaware.**

It may be envy, but how I wish I could express myself half as well as her. “Earth’s crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God,” It is so very common of our human condition to admire and enjoy the Creation without once thinking of the Creator. Even when looking at things created by artists we say, “My, how beautiful. How poetic. How pleasing,” without ever asking who the artist or writer is. We take the energy and time to enjoy it, but never consider how it came to be in a place so that we could bear witness to it.

And because we separate our experiences from the creator of the experiences, we forget just who is or isn’t relevant to our lives. We believe that

the object we are focused on has relevance, but not the creator of the object. But when the object was created, the creator was sending us a message by trying to get us to understand something, to feel something, to hear the message that comes from beyond just the words. To hear the babbling brook or the wind in the trees. Of all the creatures on this planet, only human beings are capable of this type of interaction. Only we have the ability to seek clarification from the artist.

Our problem in understanding the world in which we live is not that we aren't observant, but that we don't spend any time talking to the author, the Creator. We look at the world and what we believe is right or wrong with it, and never seek clarification or validation. If we think that something is wrong, we assume that the artist is wrong instead of searching for purpose beyond our limited senses. We want the world to meet our expectations without ever seeking God's intentions. Do we ever stop to consider that maybe God's intentions were never geared to fulfil our expectations? Is the relevance of God today based on our own pre-conceived notions? If God's intentions don't match up with our expectations, do we take the time to examine our expectations, or do we just throw out our beliefs and theologies and assume that God just isn't relevant anymore? That God can't be counted on to have our backs.

I know how harsh that sounds but look at the world around us and the way people approach this dilemma. People are leaving the church because God doesn't seem to meet their needs, that worshipping God is just "invisible pie in the sky fantasy", without merit in the real world that we find ourselves. We have trained people... yes, we have trained people that they should go to a church

building to find God, and when they don't find the God that they expect to find there, they just turn around and leave, telling everyone that God is irrelevant and unnecessary. Simply because he doesn't meet their expectations and they aren't willing to do any soul-searching regarding those expectations.

I really can't blame them much. Like I said, we have taught people to think that way, that the Christian life is an easy way out, that God does all the work, that the only time we need to even think about God is when we find ourselves in over our heads, that God isn't relevant unless we make him relevant. All roads seem to point back to us and our perceptions, limited as they are.

Consider for a moment, does anyone believe that God sits on his throne looks down and the earth and says, "Human beings have lost all their relevance. They no longer care for each other. They don't take care of each other's needs. They start wars. They allow people to starve. They no longer serve a purpose. I think it is time to get rid of them because they truly are no longer relevant?" Do you think that God is ready to admit that the sacrifice of his son on the cross was a mistake and that the resurrection no longer matters? That it isn't relevant to today's world? That maybe humans have outgrown such things? Where's the grace, mercy, and love in that?

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Genesis 1:26

Humans are the only creatures created in the likeness of God. How can our Creator believe that we are irrelevant, that we no longer matter, when we are like him, just as he created us?

4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”

7 So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Galatians 4:4-7

We are so relevant in the eyes of God, that he calls us his children. Do our own children become irrelevant to us when they mess up? Do we tell them that they aren’t our children anymore? Of course not. Even if we are forced into a position where “tough love” becomes necessary, they are still our children. Why would we ever expect less from our Heavenly Father?

But here is the real kicker, God allows us to find him irrelevant. He lets us walk away. He lets us stand in the darkness, if that is what we want to do, but he never he loses hope that we will return to him. The fact that we can find God irrelevant to our lives doesn’t mean that he is irrelevant in our lives. He’s never

really very far away. He's always ready to catch us when we fall, just like a parent when a toddler is learning to walk.

We can be such a stiff-necked people. We can ask God for help or answers and if we don't like his reply, we just turn away and look for answers everywhere. That's because we often don't want to hear the truth, but simply hear what we expect to hear to validate our own opinions. Let's face it, if we pray to our Heavenly Father for help or answers, we can choose to believe that the help or answers are irrelevant. God gives us that choice. But our opinion does not change the fact that God is God, and we are not. It just means that we are ignoring the truth and find greater comfort in hiding in the darkness and shadows, often because we do not want to admit that the fault is really our own because we trust our human senses more than we trust God's input into our lives.

I want to read this passage of scripture to you. It's found in the third chapter of John. We often focus on verses 16 & 17, but I want you hear all of it in context because context gives us understanding and clarification.

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

It's our nature to hide from the light. Jesus knows this about us. We simply don't want God to know how dirty our lives are. And rather than expose ourselves to the light of God's presence, we choose to just pretend he isn't there, that he can't see us, sometimes to the point of totally ignoring his existence. If we don't believe God is there, that he is irrelevant to us, then we no longer feel his judgement and can get as grimy and dirty as we want to. We just simply blot out John 3:17.

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

We expect condemnation. We do not anticipate forgiveness, grace, and mercy. So, if God is irrelevant, then we no longer have to worry about his judgement.

But that is not God's intention for us. His intention for us is the forgiveness of our sins and a cleansing of our unrighteousness. He wants us to be able to be all that we were created to be, his children. We are significant to him. We are relevant to him. And all he really wants from us, is that we find relevance in the fact that he wants the very best for us. That he has our backs.

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

For God so loved. We love our own children, but don't we also crave to know that they love us as well? Why is that so difficult for us to understand when we start talking about the relevance of God?

“Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?, says God. Tell me, if you understand.”

This week, I would like for us all to examine how God is significant in our lives; how is he relevant. Is our relationship with our Creator one of reciprocal love, or is it one-sided? Have we told God lately that we love him, that he is important to us, more important than anything else in our lives. Have we told him that his presence is so significant, so relevant, that our lives wouldn't be the same without his presence? Think about that. Pray about that. If we just allow God to make us relevant as his hands and feet in this world, we will discover just how truly relevant he is to both us and the people that we serve.

God bless you all,

AMEN

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