

“And the Earth Moved”

Colossians 1:15-20 ¹

I ask you now to put on your helmets and fasten your seat belts, because this morning I’m going to take you on a whirlwind tour of time, using an outline organized around five cataclysmic events: **Creation; Collision; Crucifixion; Conquest; and Completion**. We’ll begin, naturally enough, with **CREATION**.

I’ve shown you this particular photograph before. It’s called “The Hubble Ultra Deep Field,” and it was taken by NASA’s Hubble Space Telescope during 400 orbits around our planet. This photograph penetrates nearly to the theoretical limit of visible light, and it reveals a small slice of the universe “only” 800 million years after that mind-boggling explosion astrophysicists euphemistically call “the Big Bang.”²

Eight hundred million years is a length of time beyond our comprehension, but to go back that near to the Big Bang covers 94% of the 13.73 billion years since our universe began. Even more amazing, NASA’s Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe has penetrated to within 380,000 years of creation, which is 99.997 percent of the entire history of the universe.³

As a result of these astounding achievements, astronomers can now say with confidence that they’ve witnessed essentially all of cosmic history. They can also say with confidence that the universe has been expanding continuously—and at an accelerating rate—since the moment of Creation, with some parts of the universe now moving away from us at speeds greater than the speed of light.⁴

You’ve also seen this picture before. This is a photo of part of the Large Hadron Collider, or LHC, near Geneva, Switzerland (notice the man at the bottom of the picture for scale). The LHC is the largest particle accelerator in the world, an underground doughnut nineteen miles in circumference that can accelerate beams of subatomic particles to nearly the speed of light.

The LHC uses thousands of huge magnets, cooled to nearly absolute zero, to guide particle beams in a vacuum greater than that of outer space. The internal pressure of the LHC is ten times less than the pressure on the moon, and its internal temperature is even colder than outer space.

The idea is to cause tiny beams of subatomic particles to collide, a feat that has been compared to firing tiny needles from two positions 10 kilometers apart with such precision that they hit each other in the middle. Amazingly, such collisions are now fairly commonplace in the LHC, and when these light-speed beams collide, they create temperatures 100,000 times hotter than the core of our Sun, recreating conditions similar to the first few milliseconds of the Big Bang. It was by these collisions that the existence of the Higgs Boson was confirmed, as we noted here several weeks ago.

Well, that was the cataclysm of *Creation*—briefly, but not nearly so brief as the Big Bang itself. Our second cataclysm, **COLLISION**, is equally mind-boggling. Scientists believe that our planet is approximately 4.57 billion years old. They are also convinced that at some point in its

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on April 16, 2017 – Resurrection Service.

² <http://hubblesite.org/newscenter/archive/releases/2004/07/image/a/>

³ <http://map.gsfc.nasa.gov/news/>

⁴ Hugh Ross, *Creation as Science: A Testable Model Approach to End the Creation/Evolution Wars* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), pp. 49, 85-86.
<http://curious.astro.cornell.edu/question.php?number=575>

first fifty million years Earth was hit at a forty-five-degree angle by an object the size of Mars, traveling at the surprisingly slow speed of about three miles per second.

Astronomer Hugh Ross pointed out that “This crash resulted in a planet with its surface gravity, surface temperature, atmospheric composition, atmospheric pressure, iron abundance, tectonics, volcanism, rotation rate, rate of decline in rate of rotation, and stable rotation axis tilt *all* in the just-right range to support advanced life.”⁵

It was this collision that formed our Moon, and astronomers have calculated that if the Moon’s mass was larger or smaller by only two percent, or if Earth’s distance from the Sun varied as much as one percent, life on Earth as we know it would not be possible.⁶ Considering such matters as these, physicist Freeman Dyson commented, “The more I examine the universe and study the details of its architecture, the more evidence I find that the universe in some sense must have known that we were coming.”⁷ Others, including astrophysicist Paul Davies, have noted that “It seems as though somebody has fine-tuned nature’s numbers The impression of design is overwhelming.”^{8,9}

The psalmist came to a similar expression of wonder three thousand years sooner: “*When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you set in place—**what are people that you should think about them, mere mortals that you should care for them?***” (Psalm 8:3). The answer to that question is our quest this morning.

Hard as it is to imagine, given the unimaginable grandeur of Creation, the Bible tells us that a simple Galilean carpenter, Jesus of Nazareth, *is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see . . . Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together—even the “small spinning atoms and stars that shine” as my friend Paula Testerman’s Resurrection Doxology puts it in your worship order (Colossians 1:15-17).*

That’s Who Jesus Is, and yet, *although the world was made through him, the world didn’t recognize him when he came. Even in his own land and among his own people, he was not accepted (John 1:10-11). But Jesus, though He was God, did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal’s death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8).*

Now that’s astounding! And when we consider this morning’s third cataclysm, **CRUCIFIXION**, the Bible tells us that *it was our weaknesses [Jesus] carried [to the cross]; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God for his own sins! But he was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. He was whipped, and we were healed! All of us have strayed away like sheep. We have*

⁵ Ross, p. 114.

⁶ Ibid, pp. 112-113.

⁷ Freeman J. Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe* (NY: Basic Books, Perseus Books, 1979), p. 250.

⁸ Paul Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1986), p. 203.

⁹ Further, physicists John Barrow and Frank Tipler have concluded that “For an advanced species as technically capable as humanity to arise from a suite of bacterial species in 10 billion years or less, the probability is 10^{-24,000,000}. Such a number is indistinguishable from zero” John Barrow and Frank Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 510-573.

left God's paths to follow our own. **Yet the LORD laid on him the guilt and sins of us all** (Isaiah 53:4-6).

And, at the very moment Jesus died,¹⁰ bearing in ways beyond our knowing the horrendous burden of our Sin, *the curtain in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead after Jesus' resurrection. They left the cemetery, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people* (Matthew 27:51-53).

It's noteworthy that Matthew wasn't even able to wait one sentence after telling us of Jesus' death to tell us also that death could not hold Him! **The wonderful Good News that we celebrate this day hinges on the fact that the crucifixion was not the final word.** So it is that this morning's fourth word is **CONQUEST!**

¹ Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. ² Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. ³ His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. ⁴ The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.

⁵ Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. **He isn't here! He is risen from the dead,** just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. ⁷ And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you" (Matthew 28:1-7).

My friends, **the Earth shook at its CREATION. The Earth shook in ancient COLLISION. The Earth shook with sorrow when its Creator died (CRUCIFIXION). The Earth shook with joy when its Creator vanquished Death (CONQUEST). And the Earth will shake once more, when God brings all things in the universe to COMPLETION at the end of time.** Here's part of what the Bible tells us about that Day:

- When God spoke from Mount Sinai his voice shook the earth, but now he makes another promise: **"Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also."** This means that the things on earth will be shaken, so that only eternal things are left (Hebrews 12:26-27).
- Immediately after the anguish of those days, [Jesus said,] *the sun will be darkened, the moon will give no light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in heaven will be shaken. And then at last, the sign of the coming of the Son of Man will appear in the heavens, and there will be deep mourning among all the nations of the earth. And they will see the Son of Man arrive on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory* (Matthew 24:29-30).

My friends, **Jesus is the Lamb who was killed before the world was made** (Revelation 13:8). Before God ever spoke the Word of Creation that resulted in the Big Bang, Calvary's cross was already in view. Later, when the day of crucifixion came, the Bible tells us that Jesus chose to go to the cross because of the joy awaiting him (Hebrews 12:2).

Now the Bible tells us that Jesus created everything in the heavens and on earth, and that He holds all creation together at this very moment. What could possibly have been available to

¹⁰ A moment that was established even before Creation—www.bethlehemstar.net.

Him on the far side of the cross that wasn't available without it? I suggest to you that **there's only one thing in the incredible expanse of this universe that Jesus didn't have without the cross: *the possibility of spending eternity with you.***

Because the fire of God's holiness consumes any Sin that comes into God's Presence, you and I, as sinful persons, are forever prevented from experiencing the intimate, eternal relationship with God that God planned for us, and there's nothing we can do about it. But because of God's unbelievable love, *God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The movie *Antwone Fisher* is the true story of a young man abandoned at birth by an incarcerated woman, and who was then raised in abusive orphanages, foster homes, and reform schools. After his 18th birthday, Antwone joins the Navy, where his anger gets him in a lot of trouble. After getting in several fights, Antwone is ordered to undergo counseling, and his psychologist encourages him to find his roots as a way to begin healing.

After several phone calls he reaches an aunt and uncle in Cleveland who escort him to the dilapidated apartment complex where his birth mother lives. A suspicious and aloof woman answers the door. When she realizes that Antwone is her son, the woman retreats to another room and sits down on a soiled couch, crying silently.

Antwone asks for some explanation as to why she never came to rescue him or why she never sought him out. She cannot answer, but simply stares ahead, not daring to look at him, tears rolling down her expressionless face.

He gently kisses her on the cheek as if to say, "I forgive you," and walks away. As he gets out of the car at his uncle's house, Antwone feels completely alone in the world. But as he enters the front door, Antwone's world changes as he's met by a chorus of cheers from a huge crowd of relatives, all waiting to meet him for the very first time.

There are children, couples, cousins, uncles, and family friends, all smothering him with hugs, slaps on the back, and beaming smiles. The hallway stairs are filled with kids holding up signs with his name scribbled next to smiley faces and rainbows. Antwone slowly takes it all in, overwhelmed.

He is then led into the next room where a grand feast is spread across a long table. The table is overflowing with chicken, mashed potatoes, pancakes, fruit salad—with all the good food you can imagine. The room is prepared for a celebration. For the very first time in his life, Antwone is adored. And for the very first time in his life, he belongs.

As Antwone surveys the room, an elderly woman sitting at the end of the table knocks to get his attention and then waves for him to come to her. She slowly raises her arms, grabbing his hands and caressing his face. A tear runs down her cheek as she says with great feeling, "**Welcome.**"¹¹

My friend, that's the kind of welcome God plans for you, too. God has engineered this amazing universe with one end in view: spending eternity with you . . . but **that will only happen by your own decision.**

¹¹ *Antwone Fisher*, A Mundy Lane/Todd Black Production, 2002, written by Antwone Fisher and directed by Denzel Washington.

I asked a question earlier that went like this: “*When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you set in place—what are people that you should think about them, mere mortals that you should care for them?*” (Psalm 8:3). I haven’t really answered the question, because it makes no sense at all for God to love you and me with the extravagance of this incredible universe and at the price of Calvary.

But whether I can answer that question or not, Jesus’ question continues to echo down the corridor of the centuries. *It is the central question in all creation: **Who do you say I am?*** (Mark 8:29).

You may know that the third book in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* is *The Return of the King*.¹² When Aragorn, the Returning and True King, enters his fortified capital, Mina Tirith, for the first time as king, the city’s “mayor” proclaims the king’s royal pedigree for all to hear: “Here is Aragorn son of Arathorn, chieftain of the Dunedain of Arnor, Captain of the Host of the West, bearer of the Star of the North, wielder of the Sword Reforged, victorious in battle, whose hands bring healing, the Elfstone, Elessar of the line of Valandil, Isildur’s son, Elendil’s son of Numenor. Shall he be king and enter into the City and dwell there?”

And there was another King who also labored in obscurity: unheralded, humbly serving the people over whom He had every right to reign, laying down His life for them, and today He enters here

Here is Jesus the Christ, Son of Joseph of Nazareth and Son of God, the Second Adam, the Bright and Morning Star, the First and the Last, victorious in battle, whose hands bring healing, Mighty Second Person of the Trinity, Son of David, Son of Man, Word of God Incarnate, the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. **Shall he enter our hearts—shall He enter *your heart*—and dwell there?**¹³

A Resurrection Doxology

All creatures, made by love divine,
 Small spinning atoms, Stars that shine,
 Praise our Maker! Alleluia!
 God’s love endures, transcending death
 Through Living Word and Spirit’s breath.
 Praise the Savior, praise the Spirit!
 Let Creation echo, hear it:
 Alleluia!

Paula Meador Testerman

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Return_of_the_King

¹³ Ken Langley, Zion, Illinois; www.preachingtoday.com.