

FEATURE: God's Two Books – Charles Hummel

- VOICE: How would Einstein describe a sunset? And how would Beethoven depict that same sunset?
- PROF.: If Einstein and Beethoven **differed** in their impressions of a sunset, would one of their descriptions be **WRONG**? Or can two descriptions of the same situation – **both be right**?
- FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT
- VOICE: Charles Hummel earned a Ph.D. degree in Chemical Engineering from Yale University. He was president of Barrington College, and Director of Faculty Ministries of International Fellowship of Evangelical Students,¹ an organization which presents the Bible to university students in intellectually-reasonable ways.
- At a conference of the American Scientific Affiliation, Dr. Hummel imagined Einstein and several distinguished friends, meeting for some thought-provoking sight-seeing.
- PROF.: Let's suppose we have Einstein, the artist Gauguin, Beethoven, and the Psalmist David – all going out to see a beautiful pastoral scene on a mountain. They meet there during the last hour of daylight, and observe the scene through sunset. They agree that each one will represent the scene in his own way, and come back a year later to compare their results.
- The next year, Einstein brings out a blackboard. He writes out many mathematical formulas – describing the wavelength of each coloration, the rotation of the earth and all that kind of thing. He says, “This is the way I perceive the natural world – scientifically measuring and quantifying.”
- Gauguin doesn't understand Einstein, but when it's his turn he brings out a painting of a flaming sunset. He says, “This is what I saw in that pastoral scene and sunset last year. This is my perception of it.”
- Beethoven says, “Well, Einstein's formulas and Gauguin's painting are interesting to look at. But I'm expressing my perception of that scene, via music. Close your eyes, and I'll play a recording of my new symphony.”
- MUSIC: PART OF BEETHOVEN'S SIXTH SYMPHONY. AFTER A FEW SECONDS, CONTINUE UNDER PROF'S VOICE.
- PROF.: Beethoven plays his Sixth Symphony, his Pastoral Symphony. That's his perception of the natural world.
- MUSIC: SEVERAL MORE SECONDS, THEN FADE UNDER PROF AT AN APPROPRIATE MUSICAL PASSAGE.

¹ Known in some countries as InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

PROF.: Then the Psalmist David brings out the nineteenth Psalm. He reads: “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.” (verses 1 & 2).

David worships and glorifies the God who *made nature*.

So it's futile to ask which is the *best*, which is the *valid* representation of reality. It depends on *the purpose*.

If you want to go into space, you use Einstein's formulas. If you want something decorative for your home, most people would prefer Gauguin instead of the formulas. After an exhausting day of work, Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony is a great way to relax. And if we want to worship and praise the Creator for the greatness of what we have seen, David's Psalm is ideal for that purpose.

So, there are many ways to describe a world as complex as the one in which we live.

VOICE: We're listening to a lecture by the late Dr. Charles Hummel, speaking at a conference of the American Scientific Affiliation about various ways to view reality.

If God knows everything, he knows all aspects of reality. If he wanted to present a message in a way understandable to everyone on Earth, from which angle would he present it?

Dr. Hummel answered by imagining Einstein conversing with an ancient Greek philosopher who thought the sun rotated around the Earth...

PROF.: Einstein and Ptolemy had quite different understandings of the way the universe works. But if they agreed to go fishing tomorrow, and if they said, “Let's meet at *sunrise*,” they would have no problem understanding each other. They would all arrive at the same time, even though they would have different ideas about the cosmology of whether or not the sun was really rising and setting.

So the Bible uses popular, non-technical language. It is written in the popular language of the way things *appear* to be. It speaks of the sun rising and setting and moving across the sky. That's why the Bible never goes out of date; it's good for all cultures, because all peoples can see the sun rise and set.

VOICE: After illustrating that the Bible uses *non-technical* language, Dr. Hummel continues...

PROF.: Secondly, the Bible uses *non-theoretical* language.

The Bible is remarkably free from attempts to explain *how* various events took place. We do read that God made an east wind blow to divide the Red Sea and provide a dry path for the ancient Israelites to escape from an army pursuing them. But that's as close as the Bible gets to explaining how something happens. The Biblical writers were not very concerned with the immediate how – the method by which God acts. They wanted to know *who* did something, and *why* he did it – the purpose and the plan.

VOICE: Professor, I've heard some people express the idea that God had revealed himself in two books. One of his revelations is the book of his written Word, the Bible. The other is "the book of God's works."

Will you please elaborate on that idea?

PROF.: As far as I'm aware, sixteenth-century English philosopher Sir Francis Bacon was the first to call nature "the book of God's works."

Every lightning bolt shows God's power. The intricacies of the human body show God's wisdom and design genius.

VOICE: But if all we knew about God was that he generated lightning bolts, we might be terrified of him.

PROF.: Right. Seeing indications of a Being stronger and smarter than we are, can either comfort us – or frighten us. It depends whether the superior Being is our friend, or our enemy. Nature, the book of God's works, doesn't tell us whether its creator is friendly or hostile.

To answer that problem, Bacon wrote that the Bible is "the book of God's Word." It tells about God's personality and moral character. It says God loves us.

God tells us through the book of nature, that he made us and is stronger than we are. In the Bible he says he loves us; he wants to use his power to help us, not to harm us.

God's exact words are, quote, "For I know the plans I have for you, ...plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 19:11).

VOICE: But if the Bible is inspired by a super-intelligent God who made the heavens and the earth, why isn't the Bible written in intellectual language?

PROF.: Imagine you were God – the all-knowing, all-powerful Creator. You made thousands of millions of galaxies and accelerated them throughout an expanding universe. Then you populated at least one planet with creatures intelligent enough to analyze and appreciate what you, the wise Creator, had made.

Suppose you wanted to communicate with your highest creature. You know that only a small percentage of the human race understands differential equations or biochemistry. So what level of complexity would you use for the book you wanted to the whole human race to read and understand?

VOICE: I'm beginning to see your point. A good communicator doesn't talk "above the heads"² of his audience. A good teacher doesn't flaunt his knowledge – as if to brag, "I know things you don't. I will show off my knowledge, without teaching you anything in the process."

2 Beyond their ability to understand.

PROF.: Right. God wanted to communicate to a readership the Bible describes as “whosoever.” (John 3:16). If the Bible had been written so complexly that it took a doctor's degree to understand it, that would have defeated God's purpose of making it a message for all of us.

VOICE: If the Bible really is the all-wise God's message to the entire human race, the Bible ought to have a style that is transparently clear to both scholars and non-scholars.

PROF.: And that's exactly the kind of style the Bible does have.

VOICE: Would a modern illustration be a research scientist who simplifies his presentation when he's lecturing to a non-technical audience?

PROF.: Yes.
God told us only a little about the beginning of the universe and other matters that scientists can investigate. But what he did tell us is enough to establish that he knew what he was talking about...

VOICE: (INTERRUPTING) And to imply that the One inspiring the Bible to be written, was the one who created the universe.

PROF.: Yes. After demonstrating that, God devotes most of the Bible to the more important message – that he loves us and is willing to use his mighty power for our good.

Einstein's analysis of a sunset doesn't contradict an artistic or musical impression of that same scene. And neither of them negates the additional insight that the Psalmist provides – that nature is an expression of the power and glory of the God who made it.

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