

How we look at the world makes a difference, because the way that we look at the world shapes the way that we think about God, even if we don't mean to do it. Let me use an example so you can understand what I mean. If I were to ask you to compare the world to something, to use some kind of picture, some kind of metaphor to describe the way that the world works, what picture would you use? A very common answer to that question would be a machine. The world is like a finely tuned machine. Every gear is in its place. All the parts are working together quite nicely. Everything is doing exactly what it's supposed to do. And this machine has been running for a very long time and will continue to run just as it always has done for a long time to come. And on the surface that sounds pretty good. We could even say that God is the one who created this machine, that God is a great engineer who designed it, who put all of its parts in place, who put it into motion. And we can even see the results of his work whenever we look at the world.

But there's a problem with this picture, Christians. It changes the way that we think about God. Because the reality is, machines very often run on their own. Yes, somebody builds them. Somebody maintains them. Somebody even directs them. But a machine moves under its own power. It provides its own way of working. Think of the cars that you used to get here this morning. Yes, you started them. Yes, you drove them here. Yes, you take care of them. But they provide their own power. You are not the one who caused the thousands of little explosions that drive the engine forward. You are not the one who turns every little part, who keeps everything in its place. You are separate from the machine even as you use it. And if the world is a machine, Christians, if that's the way that the universe is, then God has also been separated from his creation. And we might start to think of him as someone distant or even uninvolved with what's going on. At best, sometimes he might come along to intervene with things, but the world's just largely running on its own. The weather we're having outside, for example, might be just something that happens, the way that this machine is going. It might even happen without God realizing it or doing anything to cause it. It's just a machine in motion. Maybe God can change it, change the direction it's going, but it takes a special intervention to do it.

But if we think about the world in that way, Christians, we lose the sense of God's nearness. We lose the sense of God's control. We might even wonder if he can or even wants to help us from time to time. It might even lead us to lose the sense of him being there at all. Because if the world is just a machine, why does anybody need to run it? There's lots of machines out there that do everything that it's supposed to do without anybody actively watching over it. Things will continue just as they have always done. But that's why it's so important how we look at the world, because it shapes what we think about God.

Let me use another example so that you can understand what I mean here. Another common answer to that question is that the world is simply chaos, that everything just sort of happens. The world is a series of fortunate accidents. One little thing leading to another, leading to another, that causes all kinds of changes. Things could go this way, things could go that way, but they end up going this way instead. Like ripples in a pond, one little thing changes and affects everything that is to come. We often see this idea in movies, and sometimes you'll hear people talking this way. People who will talk about different timelines or even parallel universes. If we could just go back in time, they say, change one little thing that we did, then everything else would be different because of it, whether for good or for bad. Or we might jump over to this parallel universe, to this place where everything is mirrored, where everything is different, all because of one change in the past, one little thing that was done differently. One little change has

enormous consequences. The future is always in flux. It's always changing. It makes for good entertainment, of course. We like to think about what would be different if we had done this rather than that. But think about how that changes what we think about God. Because if the world is simply chaos, things just happening, then what power does God really have? Is he really in control? At best, we might say that he's guiding things, that he's influencing things, that he can nudge things this way or that, but what more could we really say? It might even lead us to say, as some do, that we are the ones in control of our own future, that we shape our own destiny, that we can change what is to come. God gets kind of pushed off to the side, unable to do anything. And in that case, how could we turn to him for help? How could we trust him for anything? So we have to be careful how we think about the world, because the way that we think about the world changes how we think about God.

So how should we think about the world, then? Psalm 104, our Old Testament reading for today, shows us. Everything is the work of God's hands. God is the creator of all that is. And God being the creator does not mean that he just started things, that he built it and shaped it and set it in motion. It also means that he's in control of all things even now. Apart from God, nothing can happen. Everything comes from him. Everything happens because of him. There is nothing without God. Let's use the weather outside this morning as a real good example of this. This weather is no accident. This bitterly cold weather we're experiencing has come from God. It is God who sent the winds. It is God who sent the snow. It is God who has caused this happen. Apart from him, there would be no snow or wind. Apart from him, there would be no wind chill. In fact, apart from him, there would be nothing at all. No weather whatsoever. Everything comes from his mighty hand. Yes, I know that we understand things like high pressure and low pressure. We see the patterns in the weather. But these things are just God's usual way of doing things. There would be no high or low or anything else apart from God causing it to happen. There is nothing without him. As Psalm 135 puts it: "He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses."

We also see this idea in our reading for today, when it first looks at the sea. Verse 25 says this: "Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great." Because, Christians, in those days the sea was seen as something that was chaotic, something that was out of control. It was something that was untamable, that was barely contained. It was like a great beast being held back from destroying everything in the world. The sea is a place that is shifting and unstable, a place of storms and death. It is a very terrifying place indeed. And Leviathan, who is mentioned in our psalm, was a great sea beast, the great representative of its danger. Because in those days, especially for the pagans, the sea and Leviathan were seen as enemies to their gods. The sea and Leviathan were like the black to their white. They were always opposed to each other, always fighting against one another. They could keep it back for a while, yes, but they could never really fully defeat it. It was always something that opposed them, always something that was warring against them. It was a place of fear.

But how different is the picture that our Psalm presents to us this morning! The sea is not the enemy of God, but rather his creature. He is the one who made it, and apart from him, it would not be. In fact, as verse 26 says: "There go the ships, and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it." Leviathan, the great sea beast, is not the enemy of God, but his creature. And God so controls the winds and the waves that man can use the sea, to use it for good and not simply for evil. All of these things come from his mighty hand.

And the Psalm also shows us that every creature, whether on the sea or on the land, looks to God for its food. Verses 28 and 29 say: "When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust." If they have food, if they have anything at all, it is because God gave it to them. And if God withholds it from them, it's not like they can do anything about it. They can't find it on their own. Everything that they are and everything that they have comes from the hand of God. It is God who causes each and every individual plant to grow. It is God who gives life to every single creature, including us. It is God who puts the breath of life into our nostrils. It is God who preserves us from day to day. Without him we would have nothing, not even the very next breath that we take. All things come from his mighty hand.

And Christians, when we look at the world in this way, as everything coming directly from the Lord, then we will see God rightly too. Because then we will see that he is the one who commands all things, that he is the one who directs all that happens. We will be able to see that everything happens according to his will. Even if we don't always understand why, we can know that God is God, and trust in him through it all. Then we will be able to see that the future is in his hands, that God is the one who commands the flow of time. And he will work all things for good until the day when he finally brings all evil to an end.

But above all, as Psalm 104 tells us, when we look at the world rightly, we will be able to delight in God. Because then we will see his great wisdom. We will be able to marvel in all the works of his hands. And seeing his great wisdom in all of his creatures, we will praise him for all that he has done. And not just the big things, but everything, even the little things of life. We will be able to give thanks for another day that God has given to us out of his mercy. We will be able to give thanks for the food that we ate this morning. We will be able to give thanks that the Lord keeps us safe and leads us on our way. We will even be able to give thanks for the things that he has given and the things that he has taken away. When we see the world as happening because of the actions of God, when we see everything as coming directly from his hand, that will lead us to rejoice in him, and to say, in the words of our psalm: "Bless the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord!"

Let us pray. Almighty Creator, who laid the foundation of the earth and who commands the morning and causes the dawn to know its place, may your glory endure forever, because you are great and worthy of all our praise; to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be all things, both now and forever. Amen.