



THE LAST WORD ... ON US

On holiday a few years back, I spotted this bit of graffiti on a stone bench:

"We are here ... we are living ... but why?"

It's a great question, isn't it?

A month or so later, I was asked the same thing. A heating engineer came round to fit a new programmer for our boiler, we got talking about spiritual stuff, and he told me how he'd stayed in a Buddhist monastery in Tibet when he was younger. So, we chatted about Buddhism for a bit, and then I said, "The intriguing thing about the Buddhist religion is that it doesn't really say anything about God, and because of that, it doesn't really explain what our purpose is."

To which he asked: "So what do *you* think our purpose is?"

(I'll tell you what my answer was at the end.)

Human beings are fascinated with where we've come from. It's what drives us to dig up fossils, carbon-date bones, and map the human genome. It's also what drives us to keep old photos, trace our family trees, and discover things about our ancestors going back generations.

Because understanding 'where' helps us understand 'why.'

But to truly understand 'where', we have to know 'who' ...

John 1:1-18

As we saw last week, Jewish scribes at the time of John had come up with a nickname for God: they referred to Him as 'the Word' or *Memra* in Aramaic. And everything these scribes said about the *Memra*, John says about Jesus – beginning with the fact that He's God Himself.

Not only that, they also taught that the *Memra* was the means by which God created everything that exists – including us. This idea has its origins in Genesis ch1, where each creative act begins with the phrase, "And God *said*, 'Let there be ...'"

Likewise, in Psalm 33:6 it says this:

*By the Word of the LORD were the heavens made;
their starry host by the breath of His mouth.*

Now what does John say about Jesus in this chapter? Look at vs3: "Through Him, all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made ..." I.e. Jesus is the source of all things – from the biggest star to the tiniest molecule. And every life. That tiny little baby, lying in a manger, was somehow the designer and creator and sustainer of the entire universe – known, and unknown.

Now it's important to understand: this doesn't contradict the findings of modern science. Believe it or not, it is possible to believe in scripture and believe in science, at the same time – the 2 things are not mutually exclusive (they're just different perspectives on the same universe). But what John is saying is this: behind every bit of atomic physics and molecular biology, is Jesus.

But so what? Is this just about ticking another box on a checklist of things Christians are supposed to believe? I don't think so. In fact, I think it means far more than that. Look at what John says in vs4: "In Him was life, and that life was the light of men." I.e. believing in Jesus as 'the creator' helps make sense of why we're all here.

In particular, it helps us understand 3 things:

1) We Have Meaning. We're not just here by chance - we're here because God wanted us to be. Even more importantly, we are made "in His image" (Genesis 1). What does that mean? Well, in the ancient world, if a Pharaoh conquered a land, he would place an image of himself there, as a way of saying "Pharaoh was here." And that statue was his representative. In the same way, human beings are God's representatives – here to serve God by looking after His world, and each other.

2) We Have Value. As a creative person I care about the things I make. Even more importantly, as a parent I care about my children. And it might be difficult for us to get our heads around, but God feels the same way about us. As it says in the Psalms: "When I consider the heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him?" (Psalm 8). We are of inestimable value to God! And that can affect the way we see ourselves, and others.

3) We Have Dignity. And by that, I mean a 'spiritual side' to our being, and with it, the need to relate to God. We might ignore it, we might corrupt it, we might replace it, but it's there within every human heart. Where does that come from? From God Himself. This is what it means when it says that God 'breathed the breath of life' (i.e. our spirit) into man's nostrils (Genesis 2). The rest of the animal kingdom runs on instinct, but human beings have something else: a spirit given to us by God.

That's what John means by the 'light of men.' But what happens when you take God out of the picture? Richard Dawkins, in his book *The Blind Watchmaker*, says this:

In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication there is no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares; DNA just is, and we dance to its music.

And Merry Christmas, by the way! But let's think about what that really means for a moment. How much of what goes wrong in our world comes from a lack of meaning, or value, or dignity? How much pornography and immorality is driven by a lack of meaning, or value, or dignity? How much suicide and self-harm? How much drug addiction and alcoholism? How much murder, abuse and hate?

That is what New Atheism is selling us, ultimately. No meaning, no value, no dignity – no hope.

But Jesus? He offers us all this, and more.

So ... Why Are We Here?

We're here because God made us, to live with Him and for Him – and that was my answer to the question posed by my friend the heating engineer, by the way. But then ... human beings screwed things up. We turned our backs on our creator, and it's impacted every relationship we have.

But look at what John says in vs9: "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." The creator of all things became a part of His creation – to repair our relationship with Him and each other, and restore that sense of meaning, value and dignity.

That's why Jesus came!

And that is why we're here.

So, this Advent, may we each catch a fresh glimpse of our purpose, in Him – and help others discover it, too.