New Inventions: I Guess I Believe Memory Verse: Psalm 19:14

June 11th 2023 Scripture Reading: 1 John 1-4

SLIDE 1: Title

Today is a day of transition. Today, we take a moment and recognize the accomplishments of two high school graduates among us. My own son, Noah Bonsell whom you all know and Cole Collins who you may not know as well. Cole has been involved with youth group here at Forest Hills, he has also become an important part of community care, which is our monthly food distribution here at the church. We recognize today their change of status. They are no longer high school students and while they remain sons, there has certainly been a shift in the way that they may be considered children. Young men is what we have before us today. And I congratulate you on reaching this milestone.

Normally on graduation Sunday, we would depart from our normal preaching series and talk specifically to the themes of new horizons and inspiration for the journey to come, but instead, we are going to take a final look at this theme of worldviews. We have said how one’s worldview directs one’s life. How we see reality around us shapes and molds how we act, how we think, how we treat others. So, thinking carefully about the worldview we adopt is crucial for anyone and everyone, but especially as we reach this transition points in our lives, especially when we have big decisions to make plans to pursue. Our worldview guides that whole process and so it is very fitting for the occasion of this day.

So, over the course of this series I have been hammering over and over again the incomparable value and quality of a biblical worldview. We can go into this world, as you graduates are now, armed with a grasp on reality that outshines all others, and it’s based on the revelation of who God is as given to us in his word. There are many things we need to know and study in this life but none is as important as this old book. If we want some insider information about the ways in which this world works, we have it available right here.

Over the past three weeks we have examined three different doctrines or teachings of our culture and today we will consider a fourth and final lie that our culture wants us to accept without question or pushback. The first lie we discussed said that feelings were the ultimate guide…second was related: happiness is the ultimate goal, third; judging is the ultimate sin…and finally today we tackle the forth lie: God is the ultimate guess. And honestly these tropes are the kind of thing presented to us a great advice.

**SLIDE 2: 4 principals**

Surely you have heard such things as, “Do whatever makes you happy”, “Follow your heart.” “Don’t let anyone stand in the way of your dreams.” These type of bumper sticker mantras are the height of cultural wisdom. But the problem with them all is really the same…you lie at the center. And that is in keeping with the message you have heard all your life…and why our world has so many struggles…it’s always some form of you should live for you. And if anyone has any thoughts about God, that’s fine, but it is totally unfounded. If it makes you feel better, if it give you happiness or gets you through the day, then fine, God is a thing for you. “God”, whatever that means, represents your best guess.

Well, my dear graduates, my dear church, what if such a worldview was mistaken? What if we were not the center of the universe? Where would we be then? IN fact, we know this view is mistaken, because we have felt the effects of selfishness, both in ourselves and in others. We know what it is like to be treated poorly or dismissed by others. And unfortunately, we know what it is like to be the ones doing the dismissing. We know that the world is better when we think of others, we know we ought to be helping people and not just ourselves. But where do we get such a notion?

Surely from the start we are selfish creatures. Our family has a five month old living in our house. Yes, she is dear and sweet and cute, but let me tell you, she has no thought for anyone else. When she is hungry, she cries. When she needs a new diaper, she interrupts conversation, when she has the slightest whim for some sort of change of any kind, the whole house has to know about it. Babies are cute, but they are rather self-consumed little creatures. And, as we all know, some people never quite outgrow this stage of development. And our culture, in it’s current state, is very good at keeping us infantile: needy, demanding…selfish. Thoughts on God then become an extension of this selfishness. God is whatever best fits your life or circumstance. God is whatever best serves your current needs…ultimately his character, his power, his existence is only a guess.

Well, I would like to explore another option to this claim. I would like to consult this old book we call the Bible. Now there are those who will tell you, “Okay, yes, we have the bible, but that just represents someone else’s best guess about God.” To that I would reply, “Maybe…but have you tried it? Have you compared notes? Have you dug into what this book offers us? There is a reason it stands as the bestselling, most-researched, most written about book in all of history.” So yes, it is old, but if it is true, then its age has no bearing. And I recognize that I say these words as a father who is not getting any younger.

I would like to turn and see what some of this old book has to say. I’m going to be looking at Psalm 19, and again, I want to address this lie about God being a guess and consider for a moment what the bible has to offer on this subject. And before we actually read what it says, I want to ask you about authority. If something is authoritative, we believe it, we follow it, we find it valuable. If I wanted to take guitar lessons, I would try to learn from a master musician, not a guy who can only strum a few chords. One is an authority and one is just getting by. If I have been diagnosed with a disease of some kind, I will seek out a specialist and not a student in nursing school. We value authority. Think of all the things we accept on authority. C.S. Lewis talked about how he believed in a place called New York, not because he had ever been but because he had been told about it by someone who was trustworthy. We believe in the solar system based on this trust. In fact any and every statement about history we take on authority.

**SLIDE 3: Ninety-nine percent of the things you believe are believed on authority.**

Lewis writes, “Ninety-nine percent of the things you believe are believed on authority.” That’s a lot of things. And you graduates, you and I and all of us here would do well to question that authority. Do a little checking on the author of that text book you will have to read. Think through the agenda behind that scientific claim you hear on the news. Maybe New York does not actually match the impression we have been given. Scrutinize the authorities in your life. Make sure they should in fact be trusted. And I say the same for the Bible, because, as the truth, it can withstand all the logical concerns, all the historical conundrums and all the doubts you might have about it. The bible says, “Bring it on.” Scrutinize…verify…and if you find it true, believe it.

So I would like to read part of Psalm 19 and I would ask you all to have an open mind for a moment. Let’s take the words we read as authoritative, even if just for the sake of argument.

READ Psalm 19

**SLIDE 4: The testimony of the skies. A description of God’s Word. Our need for a higher authority.**

I know there is a lot to cover in theses words, but it is a poem and really at its core it is expressing three ideas: There is a testimony in the skies, a description of God’s word, and a statement about our need for a higher authority.

It starts off with the sky. The sky has long captivated the imagination of humans. When we could not fly in it, we dreamt of doing so. We have used the stars to navigate the seas. We have stared wondering it there was an end. And it seems the more we know about the sky and beyond, our grasp on it actually becomes less and less. Famous writer Ralph Waldo Emmerson wrote, “The sky is the ultimate art gallery just above us.” Now Emmerson was famous for being a Transcendentalist.

**SLIDE 5: “The sky is the ultimate art gallery just above us.”**

In his worldview there is no authority higher than the individual. We get to make what you want out of God. And yet, even in this quote Emmerson seems to want to press upon us the idea that somewhere out there is a great artist, who gifts us with a new work each and every day, an unending gallery. What Emmerson sees as art, the psalmist sees as glory and that glory is ascribed to God the creator, the artist himself. Day after day the skies reveal knowledge. We can know something about God by the testimony of the skies. We can understand somewhat his vastness, his creativity, his beauty. And what about what comes from the sky? Provision, life and sometimes terror and danger. But instead of worshipping this elements, like many cultures before us have done, God’s word lets us know that no, God is the painter, he is not the painting. His great mind and creativity are reflected in the painting, but he stands separate from his work. We can see some of what the painter is like through his art. It all adds up to much more than a mere guess.

Then, in verse seven, we get to a section the describes God’s word itself. King David uses many descriptors. He says God’s word is perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, pure, firm, more precious than gold and sweeter than honey.

**SLIDE 6: perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, pure, firm, more precious than gold and sweeter than honey**

I can’t think of anything else in this world that could fit a description like that. In my mind, if we consider our source, these words are authoritative because the one who wrote them seems to have experience. King David is known in scripture as a man after God’s own heart. He pursued holiness, he wanted what God wanted. We walked in the way of the Lord, and he would know if God’s word is worth following or not. He speaks from experience. Now you have coming to you loads and loads of greeting cards. And some will be funny, and some will be sappy, some will be filled with cash and some will have long handwritten messages inside. Now, of all the words found in all those cards, which words are the ones worth reading? The handwritten messages are more valuable right? The rest come from the mind of some writer who makes thousands of different cards. Those words might be kind of funny, but they are not the result of actually knowing who you are.

**SLIDE 7: The hand-written messages carry authority.**

The hand-written messages, written by those who know you and love you, those are the words that carry authority because they are based on experience. David’s words here are based on experience and he tells us not only how incredible God’s word is but also the benefits we receive from living by it: God’s word is refreshing, it gives wisdom, joy, light, warning and reward. What more could we want? What else can provide such wonderful dividends? Money might give us joy in the moment but it certainly does not provide wisdom. Romance and love can seem refreshing for a while, but it is silent as to any warnings about what the future might entail. God’s word is a gift we ought to open every day that we can…it’s benefits are unparalleled.

Finally, in verse 12 David speaks about our inability to run the show on our own. Listen to this question he asks, “Who can discern their own errors?” Or this translation asks, “Can anyone know what they’ve accidentally done wrong?” In other words, how can I know if I’m making the right choice? How can I tell if I am in the right? How can I tell if I have food on my face?

**SLIDE 8: How can I tell if I have food on my face?**

I have to ask someone else, right? I have to look outside of myself in order to get beyond my own narrow perspective. As you young men have been discerning your future plans, hopefully you have been asking others about what they think or what they suggest. You don’t know what you don’t know. You can’t see your own errors or your hidden faults. You need others to let you know about yourself, and God is not the ultimate guess, he is the ultimate Other.

**SLIDE 9: God is not the ultimate guess, he is the ultimate Other.**

He lets us know about ourselves. He is your heavenly Father, your Creator…and his word serves as a mirror. In it we can see clearly where we are in error, because his word points it out to us. It makes known our faults, it shows us the food on our face so to speak. Then, because we have been made aware of where our sins and faults lie, verse 13 asserts that these faults do not have to rule over us…we can be free from sin. David cries out to God, “Clear me of any unknown sin and save me from willful sins.” This is the wonder of the gospel, right here in the Old Testament. Both sides of the coin are covered. Both the wrongs things we do with intent and forethought, as well as those things we are unaware of – through our relationship with God – we can be free of all sin. It’s not a guess, it’s a lived reality. Like we read in 1 John, we have heard and seen and experienced the power of God.

The psalm closes with, what I call, a life prayer…a prayer that can be prayed before each day, before each conversation, before each life event: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you LORD, my rock and my redeemer.” In other words, let what I say and think about, be pleasing not to me, not to my professors, not to the cultural elites, not even to my parents. But may my thoughts and words be pleasing to the only authority in life the can protect and save, Yahweh, that God of the Bible, the Creator Artist that has gotten me this far and will fill my future with wisdom, joy and light.

If God is the ultimate guess, well then I guess I believe. Other worldviews might be able to explain what the sky is, but they cannot tell me why I care, or why I appreciate it as art. Other worldviews might be able to provide us with some broad strokes of good advice, but they cannot give us wisdom from a heart that intimately knows who we are. Other worldviews might have their famous and respectable adherents, but none of them can save us from sin. None of them created us. None of them lives as our rock and our redeemer.

If God is the ultimate guess, I have never heard a better one. Every other guess pales in comparison and lacks the meaningfulness of a handwritten message from Someone who knows me and loves me and want the best for me.

That’s our God, the bible is his message. May it form your worldview. May it provide for you wisdom, joy and light. And in response to this good God, may your thoughts and actions be pleasing in his sight. Amen.