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The Gospel of Luke
XXI. The Power of His Word
Luke 7:1-17

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“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”¹
From our earthly observation post, even under the most ideal of circumstances – say, a clear night in a Certified Dark Sky area² – we can see with the naked eye about seven thousand stars. Which is pretty impressive – until you realize how many stars are actually out there in space. How many stars the Lord God has made and set in their orbits. That number is so large that it is hard for us to get our minds around it. But let me try.

In a typical galaxy, such as our own cosmic home, the Milky Way, there are approximately one hundred billion stars. That’s how many stars are in our galaxy – one hundred billion stars. But how many galaxies are there – which the Lord God has made? Somewhere in the neighborhood of two trillion galaxies. And again, remember, each galaxy contains somewhere around one hundred billion stars. Two trillion galaxies, each containing one hundred billion stars. Which means that the number of stars the Lord God has made is something on the order of seventy thousand, million, million, million stars. That is a seven followed by twenty-two zeroes. If you have a pen or pencil, start writing out that number on your bulletin – a seven followed by twenty-two zeroes. Or we can think of it this way: if you could count every individual grain of sand on every single beach on Earth – you still wouldn’t even be close to the number of stars which the Lord God has made.³

It staggers the mind, the size and scope, the glory and grandeur of this universe God has made. But what is perhaps more staggering still is the thought of what sort of power could possibly lie behind the creation of such a universe? And how was this power brought to bear? How did it happen? How did it all come into being? Scientists describe the Big Bang and I see no Christian reason to doubt what they describe. But even science cannot peer back before that moment - cannot get back behind the Big Bang to describe what it was which caused it to happen. For that, we must open the pages of God’s Word – there are the very beginning:

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the
face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face
of the waters.*

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.⁴

Why is there something and not nothing? Because God spoke. Because God said, “*Let there be light*” – and, instantly, an explosion of light began the process which would result in seventy thousand million, million, million stars. And also the life of creatures such as you and me. The Power of the Word of God is what brought into being heaven and earth and all that can be found therein. God spoke, and it was created – the Power of His Word! The power of the Word of God is revealed in His Creation.

It ought to inspire in us a sense of awe – the power of His Word in creating the heavens and the earth. Like the Psalmist, we should stand beneath the night sky and ponder the immensity – not only of what we can see, but also of what lies behind what we can see – the immensity of the power of God’s Word which brought all of this into being. To contemplate with awe the greatness, the might, the power of God we serve – that, with but a Word, “*Let there be light,*” He could speak all of this into being:

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?*⁵

Awe at the power of His Word. Every age has its blind spots, its errors, its omissions. I think a strong case could be made that in our day it is a lack of awe before the Lord our God. An over-familiarity, our too comfortable approach, which seeks to reduce God down to our size – rather than a true comprehension of just how big and beyond us is the God with whom we have to do. We are dealing with a Being who, with but a Word, is capable of creating seventy thousand million, million, million stars. I cannot help but think of the often-quoted words of Annie Dillard:

*On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? . . . It is madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews . . .*⁶

Should not our knees tremble, our hearts pound within our chests, our minds stagger before the Power of His Word revealed in Creation? All of this exists because God spoke it into being.

And, if that is so, if we indeed can rediscover that awe at the Power of His Word revealed in Creation, then we can also be reassured, comforted, and confident by the fact that this same Power of His Word has also been spoken into human history. That God has spoken His Word not only over all Creation, but also and specifically into the life of this particular part of His Creation, can become for us the basis for an unshakable hope. If the power of His Word spoken at Creation fills us with awe, then to know that God has spoken His powerful Word also into the history of this planet and its human story is something which should fill us with powerful hope. For if the power of God’s Word is sufficient to bring forth into being seventy thousand million, million, million stars, then surely also the power of God’s Word is sufficient to bring to fulfillment all that

He has promised and planned regarding this earth and its human inhabitants who are made in His image.

Look again at our responsive reading from Isaiah 55. Look about halfway down. God reveals, through His prophet, that He has indeed spoken His Word into this world – and that such is the power of His Word in human history, as in Creation, that all things shall in the end indeed be brought round to God’s will and purpose and plan:

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.⁷*

And what is that Word which God has spoken into human history? How can we know what God is doing, what the power of His Word is even now bringing to pass? And how are we established in unshakeable hope by that Word? Questions which all have the same one Word answer: “Jesus.” Jesus is the Word God has spoken into this world and into its destiny:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All
things were made through him . . . And the Word became flesh and
dwelt among us . . .⁸*

The Word God has spoken into human history, that Word which shall not fail, but which shall accomplish that which God purposes in human history, that Word possessing within it the very same power which brought the stars into being and set them in motion – that Word is Jesus. And what has this Word God has spoken in human history revealed to us about what God shall accomplish through that Word? “Behold,” the Word of God, Jesus Christ, says, “Behold, I am making all things new.”⁹

Which means no matter how wars may rage, kingdoms totter, nations struggle; no matter how much evil and pandemics and cruelty and suffering may dominate the headlines; no matter how grim the morning and how fearful the night and how bleak may seem the horizon – we may live right now in the assurance of that promise Jesus has spoken. The assurance of hope, given to us by the power of His Word already spoken into human history, that all things shall be brought round again to good in the end. The Power of God’s Word means that God’s Kingdom will come on earth, as it is in heaven. And that while we may not be able to perceive, at any given moment, how what we see and experience on this earth could ever lead to that promised Kingdom, because of the power of His Word revealed in Creation, because of that same power of His Word now spoken to us in Jesus Christ, we can be assured that it will be so. We can live in the assurance of hope. God’s will shall be done. God’s Kingdom shall come. And all things shall be made new – by the Power of His Word.

Which draws me to something I have quoted to you many times before – it just speaks to me so powerfully of the hope we find in the Power of His Word. From the World Council of Churches, meeting not long after the devastation of the Second World War and in the dawning days of the new Cold War:

We live at a time when very many are without hope. Many have lost the hopes they had for earthly progress . . . Multitudes ask themselves, “What is coming to the world? What is in front on us? What may we look forward to?”

The answer to those questions has been given to us in the Gospel. To those who ask “What is coming to the world?” we answer “His Kingdom is coming.” To those who ask “What is in front of us?” we answer “It is He, the King, who confronts us.” To those who ask “What may we look forward to?” we answer that we face not a trackless waste of unfilled time with an end that none can dare to predict; we face our living Lord, our Judge and Saviour, He who was dead and is alive for evermore, He who has come and is coming and will reign for ever and ever. It may be that we face tribulation; indeed we must certainly face it if we would be partakers with Him. But we know His word, His kingly word: “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”¹⁰

The Power of His Word spoken into human history establishes us in an unshakeable hope.

And if the Power of His Word in Creation provokes in us awe at His greatness, and if the Power of His Word unleashed within human history establishes us in hope of His Kingdom, then the Power of His Word spoken into our individual human hearts and minds creates in us that deep and abiding trust in Him which the Bible calls “faith.” Look at our passage from Luke. A centurion’s servant is near death. As Jesus draws near to the centurion’s house to heal this servant, He is met by friends of the centurion bearing a message from the centurion, saying, “*I am not worthy to have you under my roof. But just say the word and I know my servant will be healed.*” “Just say the Word.” And Jesus then speaks that word. And that power of His Word spoken into Creation, spoken into human history, and now spoken into an individual human life is such that immediately the centurion’s servant is made whole. With just a word.

And then, entering into a village called Nain, Jesus meets with a funeral procession carrying the body of a dead man to his grave. He is the only son of a woman who is also a widow – a dear soul enduring a double grief, a double dose of tribulation and tragedy. And Jesus sees this widow’s grief, knows how difficult her life shall from that day forward be – and His heart goes out to her. And He then turns and speaks His Word into her sorrow – speaks the Power of His Word into the dead body of her son: “*Young man, I say to you ‘arise’*”. And with just that Word, instantly the young man, the widow’s son, is made alive again. Not even death is stronger than the Power of His Word.

The Power of His Word spoken into our lives, our hearts and minds and bodies, means that we may trust Jesus – trust Him that no matter what we suffer, our suffering will not have the final word. He will. Jesus will. No matter what we fear, what challenges we are undergoing, what difficulties we are facing – we may have faith not only that He will never abandon us, but also that by the Power of His Word He shall enable us to endure and, in the end, to overcome. By the Power of His Word, we may trust in His promise that He brings all things round to good, in due season.¹¹ The Power of His Word, spoken into our individual lives, means that whatever it is we are going through, for good or for ill, He will get us through. By the Power of His Word, He will even make for us a way out of what seems to us to be a situation with no way through. The Power of His Word spoken into our lives means that we may trust that He is with us in all things – and, in all things, shall be preserved. We may trust in the Power of His Word over our lives. We may have faith in the content of every promise His Word has ever made to us.

Leslie Weatherhead was a much-loved pastor and writer during the middle part of the last century. His book, The Christian Agnostic, was a Godsend to me in my youth. In another of his books, he tells the story of spending the night with some friends. When he woke up in the morning, he went to the window, opened the curtains – and there found, painted across the windowpane, the words, “*This is the day.*” When he went downstairs for breakfast, he asked his hostess about what he had found.

“Well,” she said, “once in that room I was passing through very great trouble. Every morning I wished it were evening, and every evening I wished the end of life might come with nightfall. [Then] one day I opened my Bible at the Psalms and lighted on the text, ‘This is the day that the Lord hath made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.’ And it came to me that time was no tyrant, that time had no hold on me, that it was just something I could fill with the purposes of God and then pass on gladly to the next room.”¹²

The Power of the Word of God spoken into our lives enables us to trust that the Eternal God is our refuge, and that beneath us always are the everlasting arms.¹³ And that He will not ever let us go.

The same Power of His Word which created the stars, the same Power of His Word even now bringing all things round to His purpose in human history, that same Power of His Word which healed the centurion’s servant and raised the widow’s son, is at work in you and in me – today, tomorrow, and always. And so we may trust, and so we may have faith in place of fear, that by the Power of His Word, Jesus will bring us safely through. That by the Power of His Word – even and especially when we feel ourselves at our most powerless – by the Power of His Word, we are indeed, even now, being healed, being helped, being made both holy and whole.

¹ Psalm 19:1.

² [Find a Dark Sky Place - International Dark-Sky Association](#)

³ <https://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2015/08/19/4293562.htm>

⁴ Genesis 1:1-3.

⁵ Psalm 8:3-4.

⁶ Annie Dillard, Teaching A Stone To Talk (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 40-41.

⁷ Isaiah 55:10-11.

⁸ John 1:1-3, 14.

⁹ Revelation 21:5.

¹⁰ From the Report of the Advisory Commission on the Main Theme of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches Assembly, Evanston, 1954, published in The Christian Hope and the Task of the Church (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), pp. 2-3.

¹¹ Romans 8:28.

¹² Leslie D. Weatherhead, The Significance of Silence (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1945), pp. 175-176.

¹³ Deuteronomy 33:27.