

MAN AND HIS CREATOR

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on July 20, 1969 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

On this particular Sunday the eyes of the entire world are on the moon. The dream of centuries is being accomplished, as man reaches out to another planet and actually goes there. Twelve years of concentrated planning have gone into this venture, for our space program had its beginning in 1957. Some three hundred thousand people have been employed in various companies making the hardware which makes possible this great venture. Between twenty-five and thirty billions of dollars has been expended in reaching this crowning achievement. No single event in the history of the world has been so expensive in terms of money and energy as the Apollo 11 flight. No event in history has been witnessed by as many millions of people as this event. The world's largest television audience has been watching,

While it is difficult to compare activities in entirely different spheres of endeavor, such as the performing of a heart-transplant, the writing of a beautiful poem, or a moon shot, it can probably be said that in the realm of physical achievement this particular project is man's greatest achievement. Quite logically all of this leads us to take a new look at man himself. What marvelous achievements are his! Generation by generation he has been able to do what seemed to be impossible. The spanning of vast oceans, the crossing of great continents, the construction of giant buildings, the erecting of huge bridges, and the marvelous achievements in transportation and communication--all of these are breath-taking. In the enthusiasm of this latest and greatest physical achievement there is a strong tendency to exalt man, almost to the point of reverence or worship. It is especially appropriate at this time that we take a careful look at man and his accomplishments.

Man Can Speak

It is an interesting and inspiring experience to study the various characteristics of man. Some of the most commonplace activities yield rewarding evidence of the wonderful creative power of Jehovah. For example, man can speak. This is an activity so common that it is taken for granted, and given little attention, yet it is an intricate and difficult undertaking. The average rate of speaking is approximately 150 words per minute. This means that the tongue must assume approximately 500 different positions for each minute of speaking, or a total of more than 30,000 positions for each hour of speaking. When we remember that all of us speak several hours each day, the requirements placed upon the tongue, lips, and mouth are impressive.

Man Can Hear

Hearing involves the auricle, external acoustic meatus, tympanic membrane, malleus, incus, stapes, and fenestra cochleae. The tympanic membrane, or ear drum vibrates less than 1/100 millionths of an inch yet this is sufficient for it to receive and pass on all the sounds audible to the human ear. It is impressive to know that when a baby is born the malleus, incus, and stapes, (better known as the hammer, anvil and stirrup) are full grown. Though the child may be only a fraction of his ultimate size, and though every other portion of his body will be enlarged many times before he becomes grown, this bony structure of the middle ear is full-sized at birth, because God knew that babies would need to hear immediately after birth. In the inner ear the auditory nerve is also impressive by the very fact that it contains some thirty thousand hair-like fibers which make it possible for man to hear the various sounds and to distinguish between them. Man's ability to hear is one of God's great creation achievements.

Man Can See

Seeing involves the rods, cones, and retina, as well as the nerves which connect the mechanism of the eye with the brain. It is significant that the most expensive cameras that man has been able to invent try to copy the mechanism of the human eye. Although they work on the same basic principles they are not able to achieve the instant focus which the human eye achieves. The human eye is able to focus on an object only a few inches away, or upon a distant object, instantly and without thought on the part of the one who sees. It is also able to adjust to brilliant or dim light conditions, without conscious thought on the part of the one who sees. This is another of God's wonderful triumphs of creation.

Man Can Think

Thinking involves the nervous system with its axons, nerve cells, dendrites, gray matter, and brain. Through the use of this system man achieves the power to reason, taking related facts and drawing true conclusions from them. Through the power of reason he is able to protect and extend his own life, as well as to provide food, shelter, and other necessities of life. Man also has the power to remember names, places, events, and persons of long ago. It is marvelous to observe a mind remembering something that has lain dormant for a score of years or longer. This is an achievement of no small significance.

The human mind also has the power to invent new things. Man has used this power to extend his eyesight, his hearing, his ability to travel, and other of his normal physical faculties. Through the use of radio and the telephone he has extended the range of his voice around the earth. Through the same media he has extended the ability of his ears to hear around the earth. Through the invention of television he has extended his eyesight beyond the horizon and across the continent.

It is with the mind that man has worked out the sophisticated systems that have now enabled him to fly to the moon. The genius of man is seen in his ability to comprehend the laws of the universe that are in effect, not only on the earth but in outer space. Then, his genius has worked out systems which will cooperate with these laws and reach this great zenith of accomplishment. The mind of man seems to have almost no limit to its capabilities.

A Living Soul

As wonderful as are man's physical characteristics, there is something even more wonderful in his makeup. He is made in the image of God. The Bible begins with the words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ... And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the heavens, and over the cattle, and the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them ... And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:7). When a child is born God has created not only a physical body but has endowed that body with a soul which shall continue to exist throughout eternity. There is nothing on earth so valuable or so permanent as the soul of man. This is God's crowning work of creation and man's greatest glory.

A Marvelous Creator

Approximately 3,000 years ago David wrote

O Jehovah, our Lord
How excellent is thy name in all the earth,
Who has set thy glory upon the heavens! ...
When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;
What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
And the son of man, that thou visitest him?
For thou hast made him but a little lower than God,
And crownest him with glory and honor.
Thou makest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands;
Thou hast put all things under his feet,
The birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
Whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.
O Jehovah, our Lord,
How excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8:1-9).

When David began the eighth Psalm with the words, "O Jehovah, our Lord, How excellent is thy name in all the earth," he was writing primarily to honor Jehovah. In the verses which followed he gave two arguments for God's greatness. "When I consider thy heavens" first suggested God's divine power. In the second place, he said, "Yet thou hast made him (man) but little lower than God, and crownest him with glory and honor." He further pointed out how God had placed man in a position of dominion over the work of his hands, and had put all living things under man's feet. After this tribute to man, one might expect David to say "How excellent is man!" Instead, he said, "O Jehovah, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" The heavens declare the glory of God, but no more clearly nor more emphatically than does God's wonderful creation, man. The humanist, enamored of man's greatness, almost worships man, but it is more logical to worship the being who conceived man and who created him. The product can hardly be compared in greatness with its creator.

Dr. Werner von Braun, director of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Ala., is reported in the press on this particular weekend as having spoken of the greatness of man's achievement, and of his being a product of the Creator of the universe. Although the moon-shot is an achievement involving thousands of people, there is no one man on earth that has contributed more to it than Dr. Werner von Braun. It is particularly significant that he speaks of the Creator in connection with this event. He said, "Through a close look at creation, we ought to gain a better knowledge of the Creator, and a greater sense of man's responsibility to God will come into focus." He continued, "We must learn to consider God as Creator of the universe and Master of everything. We need a greater Lord than we have had in the past (than man has understood in the past) ... Our religion, our environment and our outlook have been earthbound. Astronomy and space explorations are teaching us that the Lord is a much greater Lord and Master of a greater kingdom." He further says that he finds it as difficult "to understand a scientist that does

not acknowledge the presence of a superior rationality behind the existence of the universe, as it is to comprehend a theologian who would deny the advances of science.”

Without God Man Is A Failure

We have walked along Main Street in Los Angeles; we have visited “Skid Row” in Chicago, and we have seen the Bowery in New York. At each of these places there is evidence that man, without the guidance of God, sinks down into ruin and degradation. In these areas, and others like them throughout the world, morals are low. Men and women are slaves to drink and to dope. Money is scarce, and men must resort to the “flop-houses” for a place to spend the night. One turns away realizing that man is not always pretty. By himself, man cannot achieve the greatness of his potentialities. As one turns away from these wrecked lives, he remembers the words,

Of all sad words of tongue and pen,
The saddest are these: it might have been.

With God, Man Is A Glorious Success

Visualize with me a child, born of respectable and worthy parents. Watch him pass through babyhood into boyhood, into young manhood, and finally into mature life. His is a healthful body, his is a keen mind, his are pure and clean habits of life. Truth and honesty are part of his makeup. He has many friends and is happy in his associations with others in every worthwhile work. He is busy doing good, always ready to help and serve his fellowmen. As he goes through life he is able to meet life’s crises without flinching, for his roots go deep and his confidence in life is strong. He confidently believes that all things work together for good to those who love God. He has learned to love God and to follow the rules which God has written for happy and effective living. He follows well in the steps of Jesus, his Master. There is no more beautiful sight than one who lives life to the full, guided by the principles of righteousness as taught and exemplified by Jesus of Nazareth. Truly, that is a successful life.

John Temple Graves, in his *Eulogy on Henry W. Grady* once said, “I have seen the gleam from the headlight of some giant engine rushing onward through the darkness, heedless of opposition, fearless of danger; and I thought it was grand. I have seen the light come over the eastern hills in glory, driving the lazy darkness before it, till leaf and tree and blade of grass glittered in the myriad diamonds of the morning ray; and I thought that was grand. I have seen the light that leaped at midnight athwart the storm-swept sky, shivering with chaotic clouds, ‘mid howling winds, till cloud and darkness and shadow-haunted earth flashed into mid-day splendor; and I knew that was grand.

“But the grandest thing, next to the radiance that flows from the Almighty Throne, is the light of a noble and beautiful life, wrapping itself in benediction around the destinies of men, and finding its home in the bosom of the everlasting God.”

Conclusion

Man is truly God’s crowning work of creation. There is nothing on this earth which can compare with the perfection of man’s body with all of its God given capacities. There is nothing, that is, except the other part of man’s nature--his eternal soul. When man’s wonderful body and man’s everlasting soul are combined into one being, we have a creation worthy of God who made us. May each of us yield himself to the guidance of his Maker so that our lives may be sublime.