

“What Difference Does It Make?”

Pastor Sam Richards

26 May 2024

Texts: Luke 9:50-56

What difference does being a Christian make? Let’s start there. The plain and simple Christian, the humble believer, has an eternal, cosmic place in the Church. And the Church will outlive the universe—when the material universe reverts to primal dust, or energy and so dissolves as the final stage of its dissipation will still be standing because it belongs to an order beyond the material, an order that is suitable to immortality. That assertion lies behind Jesus’ words, **Whosoever believes in Me, thought he die; he shall live forever.** And, in another context, **Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall never pass away.** So the material universe is time sensitive. Eventually it will time out and climatically come to an end and be no more. This is true on a cosmic level and it is true on a terrestrial level. The eternity of matter is a false premise; there never is, and never was such a thing.

If your universe is limited to space, time energy and matter (STEM), it is finite as I have been defining it. Also note STEM, educationally speaking, stands for the science, technology, energy and matter curriculum and is generally taken, i.e. outside of the educational realm, STEM means the “universe,” meaning **everything**.

The biblical term for “universe” is **creation**—God created the heavens and the earth means explicitly that he spoke into existence all that is. He did so out of his own power and being—out of his own *spiritual essence* which, to the materialist, is “nothing.” The materialist denies the creation of everything out of this nothing by asserting the eternity of matter. Christians do not share this atheistic, or secular view of how things came to be. The Bible reveals the creation of all things by God and through God’s creative will. The narratives could hardly be more opposed to each other. And, of course, the consequences, or implications of either point of view, “scientific” or spiritual, are widely divergent. Some of those of the scientific perspective suggest through analysis and observation with careful calibration as well measurement that what is real is quantifiable; some of those, of the spiritual perspective, refuse to limit, or restrict what is real, or true even, to the results of analysis, testing, observation, reproducible outcomes and other scientific practices. The most obviously elusive pieces of the universe that counter the scientific claims are abstract realities (things like love, justice, truth, prophecy and faith). There is a long, protracted debates about the reality and interface of these two domains. And history bears witness that Christian scientists do exist and have made enormous contributions to the expansion of human knowledge, scientifically, philosophically and religiously.

Be that as it may, here is what I dare to declare boldly: *whatever the universe is, whatever it consists of, whatever its ultimate nature and origin, the believer and the church will outlive the physical reality, or material universe.*

Everything that is grounded in, or joined to our Eternal Head, by faith, will coexist or participate in our future immortality’ **Because of Jesus**, His followers will live forever! That is crucial, vital life-changing truth! And if that is not **true**, it would be best to follow C S Lewis’ proscription and relegate Christianity to the museum of philosophy . . . in the religious artifacts department!—where superstitions, paganism and heretical errors are

displayed. Either Christianity is a living faith, or it is the lie of a dead religion! Christianity either makes all the difference, or it doesn't make any difference.

This is a good time for us to present our scripture:

50 But Jesus said to him, “Do not hinder *him*; for he who is not against you is [a]for you.” 51 When the days were approaching for His [b]ascension, He [c]was determined to go to Jerusalem; 52 and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to [d]make arrangements for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because [e]He was traveling toward Jerusalem. 54 When His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” 55 But He turned and rebuked them, [[f]and said, “You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; 56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”] And they went on to another village.¹

Jesus' remarks relate to a prior episode where a non-believer was casting out demons in Jesus' name and the disciples had forbade him to do that. Apparently the power of Jesus' name was effectual despite the practitioner's unbelief. There are two observations I would make: first that Jesus' stance is an extension of the tolerance which Jesus implies when he says: **he who is not against you is [a]for you.** And secondly, Jesus seems very at ease, or unthreatened by the ministry of others.

I also included this caution to suggest that *not all scientists are believers*, but some are ; science can advance, never-the-less and probably should do so. Historically, Under the sanction of the church, science and civilization have both made enormous advances historically—the astronomical work of Galileo is a prime example: both the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches financed that exploration. Copernicus was a respected canon of the church as well as a renowned 16th century astronomer!

There was pre-evangelism work, announcing Jesus' approach, performed in various villages even on his final to Jerusalem and the cross. The people of this village did not receive Jesus. Perhaps this *atypical Samaritan rejection* was ethnic prejudice, or religious pride that hindered their embrace of Jesus. Perhaps it was as simple as their being outside the prophetic loop (meaning it was God's timing for Jesus to ascend up to Jerusalem and while the Samaritans thought that Jesus was merely affirming the religion of their adversaries, the Jews, what he was actually doing was laying the foundation for a whole new religion—one that built on the foundation of things that were passing away.). Regardless the Samaritans were **unwilling to make arrangements for Jesus' visit** whatever their error, or motivation.

¹Footnotes

- a. Luke 9:50 Or *on your side*
- b. Luke 9:51 Lit *taking up*
- c. Luke 9:51 Lit *set His face*
- d. Luke 9:52 Or *prepare*
- e. Luke 9:53 Lit *His face was proceeding toward*
- f. Luke 9:55 Early mss do not contain bracketed portion

Jesus was saving human life while he was destroying the works of the devil. He did so by speaking truth to false religion (disputing their tenets), and renouncing the destructive rites of heathenistic religions. While this may sound strange, Jesus was actually civilizing society! He made room for scientific inquiry by affirming the rationality and order of the universe. Most supremely, Jesus counteracted the consequences of human transgression through rising from the dead!

Men. The conduct of the Samaritans threw the disciples into a rage—and such was their indignation that they misappropriated Elijah's calling down fire from heaven. Remember, Elijah called down fire to demonstrate the reality of God—as well as the unreality of Baal! It is interesting to substitute the Palestinians for Samaritans in our contemporary setting—hostility, prejudice, hatred and antagonisms seem to be permanent features of the Promised Land,