

Bible Special 06-09-12b

Let's resume our study now. We're looking at secular humanism and its roots in empiricism and naturalism. And we have seen, first of all, the main point of our first session is science is certainly nothing to be afraid of.

We ought to be enthusiastic about science. Science is great. You will find the handiwork of God everywhere you look in science.

I mentioned earlier that I would give you a little qualification on that statement. And I've already given you part of it, which is that it needs to be genuine science. Science that is looking at facts and making factual observations.

For example, you can look in the fossil record, and you can find fossil here, and you can find a fossil there, and you can find a fossil somewhere else. And you can say there seem to be similarities amongst these fossils. That's valid.

To say this form of fossilized life was an ancestor of this fossilized form of life, which was an ancestor of this fossilized form of life, is not science. That's speculation. That is, at best, a hypothesis.

And if you label it a hypothesis and say, I think that based on these similarities, one of these gave rise to the second one, which gave rise to the third one, that's fine. Unfortunately, just as there are ne'er-do-wells all through Christianity, there are ne'er-do-wells all through science. And they will take legitimate scientific inquiry, legitimate scientific observations, and they will weave them into their secular humanist philosophy, and will draw conclusions that are not supported by the evidence, or are not forced by the evidence.

They will treat something as a virtual fact, rather than saying, this is my hypothesis, this is what I believe. They'll say, science proves that this turned into this, which turned into this, when science proves no such thing. Now, let me give you an analogy, just so that we can move on here.

You remember my quango man from the Australian Outback? I sat in the front yard and I showed him your car driving up, and he couldn't figure it out. Then I lifted the hood and showed him the internal combustion engine. So now he thinks there doesn't have to be an inventor or a manufacturer for the car, because I showed him how it works.

Just understanding how something works doesn't mean there is no designer and there is no manufacturer. Scientists, looking at genetics, looking at the behavior of heredity and so on, and biological functions and systems, that doesn't push God out of the picture at all. All it does is show the way God has done these things.

And that's how we ought to look at it. It doesn't eliminate a gap in which God exists. This whole

God of the gaps thing just annoys me to no end.

If anything, there is a science of the gaps, where there is a gap in people's spiritual perception and they try to shovel in science to fill it. We'll talk about that here in a minute. Well, all of this is related to our discussion of secular humanism.

Now, I said last time, I was going to read you, last time we looked at the Secular Humanist Manifesto. Remember that? All of the things that they claim to believe, and that they've all agreed on. This is our big thing.

Well, so let's say we decide that being a Christian is primitive and backward and superstitious. I'm going to be a secular humanist. How do people get to this point? Well, think about it.

We're alive, we were born, we're conscious, we're sentient, we can perceive what's going on around us, right? You had experiences today, you have memories of the past, you have expectations of the future, you're a thinking, rational human being, hopefully. Right? Well, let's talk about the meaning of life. What's the point of life? When I was a little boy, we lived in California on the side of a hill, and they sort of terraced it with flat places where the houses were, and then there were banks, there were embankments between each house, and there was a kind of funny plant that grew on these banks called ice plant.

I don't know if you've ever seen ice plant, but it's got these triangular or three-sided little pointy, they're not exactly leaves, they're almost like french fries, but they're three-sided, and they come to a point, and they just stick out everywhere, and there's kind of a twisty brown vine, and then these green sort of french fry-like things just stick out all over, but they're pointed, and they're green, and they're like a pickle. They have the consistency of a pickle. So, this stuff's all over the place, and in this growth that they use for ground cover out there, because it's hardy and it can survive long periods of no rain and that sort of thing, snails live in there.

And I used to see just snails everywhere. The first snails I ever saw were in the ice plant, and we would find them and we would play with them when I was a little tiny child, before I even went to kindergarten. We had these snails, and one day a little boy said, Hey, Sam, come here, I'm going to show you something.

And he had this great big old snail that had gotten out of the ice plant, and he got a salt shaker and he salted the snail, and if you've ever done that to a slug or a snail, they just fizz away to nothing. The salt just completely dissolves them. And so I was kind of feeling sorry for the snail.

I was a little kid. I thought, Oh, what did the snail ever do to you? He was just crawling along, and you salted him and killed him. And I was thinking about that little snail.

Now, that snail lived 40-something years ago out in Southern California. Who cares? One snail, more or less, in one ice plant bank, in one little town in Southern California, 45 years ago, who cares? From the empirical, secular humanist, naturalist point of view, this is human life. You're

just another snail.

You're an accident of fortunate circumstances. Your life popped into existence as a result of a series of happy accidents, and here you are. So what's the point of your life? What's the purpose of it? What should you try to get done during your brief little period of consciousness before you wink out? Because from the materialist, secular humanist point of view, once you die, you are absolutely gone.

There is no more of you left than there is of that snail. So you say, Well, I think I should have a good time. Okay.

Let's think about James Dean. He was an actor back in the 50s. He died young.

He became famous. He got a lot of money. He got a fast sports car, and he had a good time.

But then he drove too fast on Mulholland Drive or somewhere, and now he's dead. So what difference does it make if he had a good time or not? He's gone. His good time, such as it was if he had one, died with him.

So who cares if he had a good time or not? He's dead. He's gone. He's like the snail.

Good time, bad time, so what? It's barely a footnote. There have been millions of people who have lived and died. Nobody even knows their names.

Who cares if they were happy or sad or prosperous or miserable? Who cares if they died in battle? Who cares if they died of starvation? What do I care about anybody? This is almost a forced point of view if you really don't see any meaning to life. I want to read you something. This is written by a man named James Parks.

He's associated with the University of Minnesota. He started out in the United Methodist Church and went to seminary. He's got a degree.

He's got a Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary. But he is now a Universal Unitarian. UU.

Double U. He's a double U guy. Universal Unitarian. Universal Unitarian.

Universal Unitarians are secular humanists. This is what he wrote. Now he started out thinking he was a Christian, although I don't think he ever believed the Bible was inspired and that was his first problem.

This is what he said. He's talking about looking for the meaning of life. This is the title of his little essay.

He calls it a sermon. This is the title of his sermon. Looking for the meaning of life.

Now, you and I understand that our life does have meaning and purpose and definition, don't

we? Because God created us for a purpose. He has given us a viewpoint of life. We have a hope.

We have an expectation. We know exactly why God has left us here. We know what we're supposed to be doing while we're here.

And the things that we do matter because they have eternal consequences. What you do today, what you do tomorrow, is going to make a difference in the eternal future. It's going to make a difference in what your capabilities are and what your opportunities are and how close you are to the Lord Jesus Christ and how much of his presence you're going to enjoy.

Just as there are angels, Paul talks about how the stars differ in glory. One star differs from another in brightness. So shall it be in the resurrection.

You can either be a bright star or a dim bulb in the resurrection depending on the decisions and the choices, the priorities, the values that you set here. It's true for all of us. Here's what James Park says.

Looking for the meaning of life. Remember now, secular humanist, universal humanitarianist, this is what he says. When we seek to make our own lives meaningful, we might be struggling with two different sorts of meaninglessness.

We're feeling two different kinds of meaninglessness when we say, you know, I've got to get some meaning in my life. We can create many kinds of relative meanings within assumed areas of meaningful life. Money, achievement, love, marriage, children, enjoyment, and religion.

These are areas where people, you know, strive and say I want to accomplish something. It's going to mean something if I get this job. It'll mean something if I get married.

It'll mean something if I have children. It'll mean something if I engage in this religion. Money, achievement, love, marriage, children, enjoyment, and religion.

But, now listen closely, even when we have fulfilled such meanings, we might still feel an ultimate hollowness. A spiritual or existential meaninglessness. This deeper meaninglessness is not overcome by any of the relative meanings we are able to create or achieve.

Now this is well known, well documented. Many, many people who have achieved wealth, fame, fortune, all of their goals in life, have said, is this all there is? They've gotten all of those relative meanings accomplished. They have everything.

You know the Richard Corey poem? If you don't know who Richard Corey is, look him up. This deeper meaninglessness is not overcome by any of the relative meanings we are able to create or achieve. So, what do we do? He says, well, I had an early quest for meaning.

I first glimpsed the meaninglessness of life in my late teens. When I began to look deeply into my future, trying to decide what to do with my life. Many of us have been in that situation.

Some of you are in or about to be in that situation. Teenage years, begin to look deeply into the future, trying to decide what to do with life. I'm going to live life for a certain number of years.

What should I do with it? It was a time of deep searching and questioning. I will try to reproduce from memory some of my thoughts from that time. So this is what he was thinking as a teenager.

I see many people in the world running this way and that, busy with work and family and various kinds of recreation. Do you all see this? Do you look around and see people busy with various things? What does it all mean in the long run? What if I had never been born? After I'm dead, what mark will I have left on the world to show that I have existed? That I have accomplished something? Will I be remembered for even 100 years? Human life seems like a useless, meaningless treadmill. It is like a huge industrial complex for producing oil, but all of the oil is needed just to keep the machines running.

All it accomplishes is its own perpetuation. What's the point of running around in a squirrel cage, of giving my life to a rat race without a goal? Are these legitimate questions to ask? I think so. I asked him when I was growing up, What's the point? What am I supposed to be doing while I'm here? He goes on to say, My early sense of meaninglessness was directly related to death.

If we all must die, can life have any ultimate meaning? I didn't realize it clearly at the time, but this quest for meaning made me quite fanatical about doing something of permanent value. I didn't want to lose any moment of life. At the end of each day, I wanted to be able to say that I had accomplished something of lasting significance.

I will just cut aside to say, Isn't it a wonderful blessing to be a believer, and know that just by honoring God in the daily mundane things that you do, if you do homework, if you do dishes, if you do your job, if you do housework, if you do laundry, if you are faithful in the execution of things, and you do them as unto the Lord, you have gripped by the throat the meaning for that day, and you have put it into your storehouse of treasure, and you have it eternally. This is a gift of God, that we can redeem the time. Even common tasks have an uncommon value for believers, when we do them in the light of God's Word, with thanksgiving, with prayer, with an eye on heaven, laying up for ourselves treasure in heaven, not just treasure on earth.

Well, he says, I wanted to be able to say that I had accomplished something of lasting significance. I now see that I misunderstood the nature of my meaninglessness, and that I was using inappropriate methods for dealing with it. Looking for a definite purpose, a specific meaning for my life, the effort to create my own meaning did not work.

I eventually saw through all the goals and purposes of my contemporaries. Possessions, accomplishments, adventures, love, marriage, family, all seemed hollow and empty, ephemeral and fleeting. I knew these would not satisfy my quest for meaning, and I took an arrogant attitude toward those who thought otherwise.

Most people keep their eyes just a few paces ahead, they don't see their coming death, they're not asking these deep questions, they're not thinking these deep thoughts, they're just a bunch of morons. They're ignorant peasants. They don't really have a clue about the important issues of life.

So he turned to psychology and philosophy, and to cut a long story short, he didn't find any answers in psychology or philosophy. And what happened is, he said, you know, I finally realized that we can't create any ultimate meaning in our life. It's impossible.

Death takes all bets off the table. But, he said, this is where I really figured everything out. Because what I concluded, and I'm paraphrasing now the end of his long essay here, you know what he finally decided? Aha! The quest for meaning is meaningless.

I've been wasting my time trying to find meaning in life. It's meaningless to find meaning in life. That's my whole problem, is worrying about life having a meaning.

Just get used to the fact that it has no meaning, and this is existential freedom. Quit worrying about it. You know, eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

That's literally what he came out with. So, when we let go of relative meanings we once thought were absolute, when we surrender entirely, no longer depending on ourselves, perhaps we will open ourselves for the coming of meaning. Our existential meaninglessness is lifted.

Well, I don't want to belabor this point too much. But, what does the secular humanist ultimately have to conclude? There is no meaning. Life is just a fortunate confluence of matter and energy.

It's a happenstance in a particular little dot, in a particular little speck, in a particular little corner of the vast universe. It's a fluke. You pop up for a few minutes, you look around, you die.

So, you're wasting your time trying to find any meaning in it. So, what do you do instead? Well, James Parks becomes a universal Unitarian. And he says, well, we can still be spiritual.

Let's just be spiritual. Doesn't mean anything, but hey, let's do it anyway. So, what does it mean to be spiritual when you're a secular humanist? Well, he's got six points.

Number one, we must live deeply in a superficial culture. So, we want to document our spiritual and personal journey. So, let's keep a journal as we try to lift ourselves above the onrushing events of everyday life.

Let's keep a personal journal. You know, this is self-centeredness. Let me just write about myself to myself, and obsess on myself, and this will be spirituality.

Number two, self-transcendence, self-criticism, and altruism. Now, this is a quote. Our spirits empower us to step outside of ourselves, to transcend any given situation in which we exist.

We just rise above it. And from this perspective, we can even judge ourselves. This ability of spirit to criticize who we have been enables us to change ourselves for the better.

So, you know, think of a problem you've had recently. Think of some real stressful situation you were in. See, if you're a universal Unitarian, what you should do is you just got to transcend that.

Just rise above it, look down on it, and criticize yourself. Say, oh, well, you know, that's my problem right there. And then just change yourself for the better.

Just be a better person. Just change yourself. All you got to do is just rise above it, look down at yourself, and change yourself for the better.

Why didn't I think of that? Of course. Rise above it. Change it.

Because we are not encapsulated in our egos, we are able to reach out to others in compassion and concern. Altruism will become the mode of the day. Well, this is so much blathering nonsense.

Our whole problem is we can't transcend ourselves. We can't rise above. We can't be objective, and we have no power to change ourselves.

People have been trying to change themselves for thousands of years, and it can't be done. That's the whole trouble. If you have any familiarity at all with alcoholism and with Alcoholics Anonymous and the big book that comes with AA, if you haven't ever read it, I don't care if you're ever an alcoholic.

I'm not an alcoholic, but I read the book, and it's a good read. You ought to read it and familiarize yourself with its contents. You know what the single elemental principle of that program and a lot of others like it is? As long as an alcoholic refuses to admit that they have a problem, or if they say, Well, I've got a problem, but I can solve it myself.

I can rise above it and change myself. Just give me time. They never get over it, cannot cure it.

The key is recognizing that you have a problem that you can't rise above and that you can't fix, and you have to look outside yourself for the answer. The only people who ever recover from addiction are those who have the humility to acknowledge that they have a problem they can't solve themselves. Well, you're never going to get that in Universal Unitarianism.

You're never going to get it in Secular Humanism. Secular Humanism says, Hey, all you've got to do is just decide to be all you can be, and you'll be it. That's like saying, Decide you can fly, and you can fly.

I mean, it's absurd. Number three. Remember, number one is you just have to live deeply in a superficial culture.

Of course, this is kind of an arrogant attitude. It assumes everyone else is superficial. Oh, I'm not like the culture.

I'm going to breathe deeply and keep a journal of all of my inmost superior thoughts. Then I'm going to transcend myself. I'm going to figure out what's the matter with me, and I'm just going to fix it all by myself.

That's number two. Number three, I'm going to transcend inculturation. I want you to listen to this closely.

Freedom is our capacity to rise above all circumstances in which we find ourselves, and to make life-changing decisions. I'm just going to rise above it, change it by the power of my mind. Nothing is more characteristic of the human spirit than freedom.

Even though powerful socializing forces profoundly shape our lives, we always have the freedom to resist conformity. We always have the power, listen now, to resist conformity, and to define ourselves as persons who will pursue other purposes than the goals that are recommended and reinforced by our culture. Did you hear that? We always have the freedom to resist conformity, and pursue other purposes than the goals that are recommended by our culture.

What does this say? The culture is always wrong. Conformity is always wrong. If you are truly spiritually free, if you are transcendent, then you'll buck the system every time.

Do you see this message in movies? Do you see this message over and over again, where the hero breaks the rules, and is the non-conformist, and this is how you get ahead? Well, this is where it comes from. The culture is always wrong. Tradition is always wrong.

Values of civilization and society that you grow up in, they are de facto, by default, wrong. If you're free, you'll get away from those. The more fully we understand the forces of enculturation, which would shape our lives if we did not transcend them, the better we will be able to resist those forces.

Now, we had an American culture for years and years, that was, in God we trust. One nation under God. Treat the other guy the way you would want to be treated.

The Judeo-Christian ethic is ingrained and embedded, and permeates all of the foundational systems of our society. That's our culture. Do you really want to transcend and non-conform to that system? Well, that's what he's talking about.

Number four. Now that you have learned how to live deeply in your superficial culture, do you see the arrogance of this? You just look around and say, you know, everybody but me is superficial. I'm going to transcend even myself.

I will rise above the stars of God. I will be like the Most High. And I'll just make decisions and

change stuff.

Self-transcendence. Number three. Freedom.

I'll transcend the culture, and I'll choose for myself. I don't have to conform to any standard that's set by others. I'll set my own standard and conform to that.

Does this sound like anybody? You've ever seen in scripture saying, I will, I will, I will, I will, I will? Number four. Creativity. Make something genuinely new.

If you're not going to worship God, then you've got to become your own God. If you don't want to have a creator God, then you've got to be the creator God. Frequently, our human spirits dream up something entirely new.

We do not fully understand how such creative moments emerge. But when we have flashes of insight, surprising new ideas, we know that something important has happened to us. We might wish to capture and package such moments.

We cannot force our spirits to be creative, but we can be ready for creative moments when they occur. Being creative in art, writing, scientific research, etc. includes being able to recognize creative flashes and how to apply those new insights.

So this is another part of the package. I could be creative at any moment. And when it happens, I'm going to have to capture it.

Number five. Love the I-thou encounter. Discovering other persons of spirit.

There are a few other equally superior beings out there floating around in the culture, rising above it, changing themselves, eschewing all of the conformity around them, keeping their personal journal, and so on. And when you run across one, you're going to have an I-thou encounter. It's not romantic love.

That's just an emotional response. The I-thou encounter transcends the illusions of romance. We become open to each other as the real persons we are, not projecting any false images or trying to conjure up the dreamy feelings of love we have learned from the mass media.

It would be wonderful to be able to create communities of persons of spirit, but this probably cannot happen because it is so easy to confuse spiritual encounter with blah, blah, blah. Well, that's number five. Find other people of spirit, other equally arrogant types, and bond with them.

Number six, the disclosure of existential anxiety and other manifestations of our existential predicament. Now we turn to the dark side of the human spirit. Now listen to this.

If all the rest of it has been kind of flowing over your ears, listen to this. As wonderful as freedom, creativity, and love are, they come along with an awareness of anxiety, depression,

and despair. As we become more free in all our dimensions of our lives, we will also discover more angst, more existential meaninglessness.

The more you do the first five things, the more you're going to keep bumping your head on this angst, this, what's the purpose of it? I'm keeping my journal. I'm rising above. I'm changing myself.

I'm having I-thou encounters. I'm free of the culture, and I still think life is a bummer. It's meaningless.

As we become more free, we also discover more angst, existential meaninglessness. However, angst is not the last word about the human spirit. As we develop our spirits in other ways explored here, we may have spontaneous moments in which we break through to the other side of despair, in which we glimpse joy and fulfillment.

Just live along with the angst, and every once in a while you'll really have a good day. If we are open and receptive to such moments, we will attempt to become better attuned with them, trying to discover what we were doing right that allowed our existential despair and anxiety to be momentarily lifted. We must have done something right, because there for just a minute we weren't miserable.

Well, this is where you get with secular humanism. Now, it is not a valid argument to say life must have a meaning, therefore God must exist and we must be Christians. I'm not talking about arguments for Christianity.

I am saying that for those who choose against God, there is, even in their positive writings, an acknowledgement of the emptiness, the angst, the existential meaninglessness of life. It is unavoidable. Read Romans chapter 1. If you suppress the truth in unrighteousness, you are going to be miserable.

It's just a fact. We'll continue our study next week. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we are so grateful for the revelation of truth in your word, for the meaning that you have given our lives. We await the return of the Lord Jesus Christ with great anticipation. We pray that in the meantime we can make every day count.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.