

# Message to God

Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23; Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16

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I was reading New Scientist last week and I came across the latest discussion about how to send a message to Aliens about who we are. There's been lots of ideas but most are defeated by both the message and the technology. I mean, we could send a USB stick with the entire history of the world but if they don't have anything to plug it into, it's pretty pointless. Some scientists have promoted an iconic representational message – pictures etched on a bronze plaque of what we look like and some other icons to tell a story. First of all, whose story will we tell? And honestly, I struggle with emojis – how do you think an alien will cope? Another idea was recording the mathematics of a chess game. I don't even have a comment for that one – and neither did the journalist. You can see why they haven't agreed on anything yet.

It got me thinking...What if humankind tried to agree on a message *to* God? What would we say?

Our readings today are all about a message *from* God. Psalm 50 – basically puts us on trial. Isaiah virtually roasts us – where God says stop giving me stuff, I own everything already; and Hebrews tells us it is not about earthly things (sacrifices or even good deeds) – it is about faith: Faith in something we can't verify that actually makes things happen.

I don't pretend to know the mind of God but frankly, from these first readings, it sounds like he is sick of it. Isaiah (1:11) put it bluntly:

“The multitude of your sacrifices—  
what are they to me?” says the LORD.

“I have more than enough of burnt offerings,  
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;

It seems we are trying to outdo each other in our rigorousness as if there is a ranking system or a competition. If there is a modern collective sin, it is the drive to know who we are better than and how we rate in the more righteous stakes.

But in the New Testament, Jesus keeps knocking us down. Nadia Boltz Weber once said the Gospel is the worst Good News she's ever had. Every time we think we've got it, *He* tells a story That pretty well puts us in our place. Look at the Pharisee and the tax collector. (Luke 18:9-14)

<sup>9</sup> To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:

In the story, the Pharisee prays, “Thank you God that I am not like other people - thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this here tax collector - thank you God that I pray several times a day and tithe to the temple, and keep all the religious laws.”

But the tax collector simply keeps his head down and prays, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner”

Jesus said:

“All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Who do *you* think went away in with a better relationship with God?

Today, just as it was in His time, in an effort to think of ourselves as righteous, we are losing our humanity<sup>1</sup>. It pulls us apart from our best selves.

Psalms 50, by the way, unlike other psalms is not a song or a poem. It clearly is a sermon probably preached in a synagogue. It is divided in 2 parts – the first pretty well saying you don’t understand what sacrifice is – you’ve commodified it! You made it a competition; an economy and a feel-good exercise.

Now I ask you to leap forward to Jesus turning over the tables in the Temple in Matt 21:12. The sins of the past rise up *again* – as we commodify worship and righteousness. Leaping centuries later, I probably don’t have to remind you that Martin Luther’s rebellion was just for the same thing! Institutions keep commercialising God. Will we never learn?

The 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the sermon, you’ve heard before: “Practice what you preach”.

The author uses the rhetoric of a trial – calling on the heaven and the earth as witnesses and promising mercy and perhaps, a little understanding of our fallibilities but never-the-less, names us as guilty.

Today, it hard to trust our neighbours when so much of the political rhetoric is designed to divide; where a moral platform for debate is largely missing and underhanded tactics are beginning to be accepted as the norm. Parties (political and others) oppose everything in a bid to be “different” from the other party. There is no compromise -only ‘alternatives’. All this is magnified

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<sup>1</sup> Think of the Good Samaritan. Adherence to the law over humanity

by internet bots designed to divide and tribalise us<sup>2</sup>. Trust and innocence are the victims of our times.

This is not in a way an excuse but it has amplified our discomfort. What we are seeing, what we are feeling and what we are being told just don't seem to match up.

For example, we are living in a post COVID world – so we are being told. Everything is back to normal but then you look around and people are away sick, the church is not full, café's and shops are closing early, or for good. We should **feel** like it is all over but it doesn't **look** like that – so our experience does not match our observations or our feelings. Our feelings are still lingering in the depth of the last two years. And we look for evidence to verify our loss.

Forgive me, but this takes me to another New Scientist article. You see physicists spend their lives trying to objectively measure the world we live in. When we walk in the woods and smell the green richness, when we see reflective raindrops edging the leaves – no amount of chemistry, light wave measurement or mathematics can accurately capture what it is like to be deep in the woods. There is an insurmountable gap between our subjective experience and our attempts to objectively describe it. Yet our brains are made of matter so you would think that the states of mind they generate must be explicable in terms of state of matter.<sup>3</sup> The journalist said, “if we can describe consciousness in physical terms, we have to find a place for it in the universe.”

That was an ah-HA moment for me. The problem is that modern physics has always been based on the separation between mind and matter and as a person of faith, I never thought that was true – or even possible.

Well, I'm not going to bore you with quantum theory, as much as I would like to, but simply to say the view of the physical world has utterly changed in the last 2 decades. The current belief is that the world is made of invisible particles with endless possibilities and that it is in their interaction that causes things to happen and to become 'real'. In other words, the new view of the universe is based on events – rather than objects.

The article is long and goes through many theories but the long and the short of it is that if you believe in universal gravity and you understand that all things

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<sup>2</sup> Even the 'feel good' mems of quotes and cute animals are generated by malicious sources, [That Uplifting Tweet You Just Shared? A Russian Troll Sent It - Rolling Stone](#)

<sup>3</sup> Consciousness in the cosmos, Thomas Lewton, *New Scientist*, 11 April 2022 p. 38

are made out of these particles, then of course, our consciousness has an impact on the world.<sup>4</sup>

The Hebrews reading is no clearer on the theory but basically puts forward the same idea. It asserts that the obvious truth is that faith involves confidence about things that cannot be presently verified but still, participates (or even anticipates) a final outcome. It means we have faith that we know the answer before we know the answer and in knowing *that* has an impact on the future – not the now.

Faith is not just a powerful motivator. It holds its own power. It is a statement towards humankind's destiny. It doesn't mean if we believe something hard enough, it will come true but there is no doubt, it has an impact.

If I look at faith through the scientific lens I've been using, it is like a water molecule. Individually, molecules are not wet but collectively, they make an ocean. That's why faith, and specifically collective faith as in the body of Christ is so important.

The answer to overdoing our sacrifices and competing on our burnt offerings is to spend time on your faith. Question whether your offerings and deeds are to impress. Stop looking over your shoulder and falling into the sin of righteous competition and most of all,

Spend more time *with* God rather than proving you are worthy.

In answer to our COVID emotional dilemma, we have to imagine the world as we want to live in it: Extending hope instead of loss, kindness instead of competitiveness. Do not be confused by the mixed messages nor let your feelings colour your perceptions as your feelings may indeed create their own reality.

And back to our trial – if we were being charged with being Christians, would there be enough evidence to convict?

Finally, before I launch that spaceship telling aliens who we are...what is the message *you* want to send to God?

Let's settle that one first.

Amen

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<sup>4</sup> The different theories are about HOW that happens.