

(Hebrews - Part 21): The Transcendental and Mystical

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer explores the transcendental and mystical aspects of Christianity, emphasizing the interconnectedness of scripture and the divine presence in our lives.

Duration: 31:36

Scripture: Exodus 25:40, Hebrews 7:22, Hebrews 8:1-3, Hebrews 8:5-6

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the interconnectedness of the Christian faith and the natural world. He argues that just as the Bible is a letter from God to his people, nature also bears the signature of its creator. The preacher highlights the vastness and complexity of the stars and galaxies, emphasizing that they are a testament to God's creation. He criticizes the tendency to reduce nature to a mere system to be studied, rather than appreciating it for its inherent beauty. The sermon also mentions the importance of understanding certain key truths in order to fully comprehend the teachings of the Bible.

Transcript

Hebrews 8th chapter, reading the first six verses. Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum. We have such a high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, and ministered of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man.

For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices, wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law, who serve under the example and shadow of heavenly things. As Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle, for see, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shown to thee in the mount.

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. Now it could easily be a proof of the inspiration of the scriptures, or a proof of the lack of inspiration among his ministers, or both, that it takes us preachers about twenty times as long to explain a thing as it does the Bible writer to write it. I am now in my twenty-second sermon on the book of Hebrews, and am only at the beginning of the eighth chapter.

I would say that indicates a lack of inspiration in the pulpit, or a tremendous inspiration in the scriptures. I believe in the latter, and I am fearful about the former. Now I want to ask you to follow me here and help us to understand this, for my job is to give you the scripture and then give you the sense.

And try to make you understand the scripture. That's why I'm here. That's why any man of God ought to stand in the pulpit, and he has no excuse for standing there unless he is trying to do that.

Some can do it better than others, but we'll do the best we can. Now to the understanding of this passage which I read, admittedly a very difficult and involved passage, to the understanding of this, it is necessary that we get certain truths clear. You see, there are certain keys that unlock doors in which there are stored rich treasures of other truths.

And if you don't have the original key to the storehouse, you don't have these other truths understood at all. Now, one or two of the truths, maybe, or one, or whether it's one or two, it's one grammatically, but possibly two grammatically, but possibly only one actually. These truths are transcendental and mystical.

That is, I mean by this, that there are certain concepts which are necessary to the Christian faith. You see, the word of God interlocks so completely that if you destroy any one part of it, you've destroyed the rest. That is why I have no place in my heart and no place in my head for a liberal, because a liberal insists upon believing what he wants to believe and rejecting what doesn't suit him.

And the result is he has destroyed everything because each thing depends upon everything else. When we come to the scriptures, we've got to remember that all the way through the Bible, we are taught what has come to be called sometimes the transcendental view of the world. I mean by that, and I'll try to explain it, that word means a half a dozen things or a dozen things in philosophy, but I mean by that that there is somewhere an absolute, there is somewhere that which is not relative but fixed and final, there is that which had no beginning and can have no ending, there is that which transcends life and time and space and matter and motion and law and all these things, and that we call that one God.

And we Christians, when we talk about him, call him our Father which art in heaven. Now, that is one of the great truths of the New Testament, and it is one of those truths in the scripture which if you remove it, you have done to the scripture what you do to a sweater when you get a hold of a woolen sweater or a glove and you get a hold of a thread and pull, and you just pull long enough and you've pulled it out into one long thread and destroyed the sweater or the mitten. So if you take or attempt to take this great central truth out that God is God and that he had no beginning and that he in the beginning, that is the beginning of the creation, created all things in heaven and earth that are visible and invisible, thrones and principalities and powers and might and dominion and all things that are named were created through him and by him, you take that out and you unravel the sleeve of Christianity until you've got nothing left but a memory.

We have to accept this truth. Now, I know that some don't accept it. Communists deny it and the materialists deny it and certain scientists deny it, but we don't care what people deny and we're not in the business of denying things, we're in the business of affirming things.

Our job in life is not to deny but to affirm. And we therefore, regardless of how it sounds to some, affirm that there is another world above this world of which this world is but the shadow and that in that world there is a throne and on that throne there is a God ruling his universe. And then there is the mystical element also.

By that I mean nothing of the esoteric religion of the East, nothing like that. I mean by mystical, spiritual, that there is such a thing as a Christian actually knowing God and meeting God for himself, that we can press our way into the sanctuary, into the Holy of Holies, and with our hearts meet and know and feel and sense and experience God in a manner more wonderful than any man or woman can experience in a human thing or in a human being. So this is what is taught here, and this is basic.

If you come to the book of Hebrews denying the presence, the existence of a transcendental world of which God is the head and the creator and the Lord, if you come to the book of Hebrews denying the mystical element in Christianity, that is, if Christianity is reduced to a doctrine which you can explain and there is no intuitive knowledge, no unmediated, direct knowledge of the heart to God, then you might as well close your Bible and go for a walk, because you'll never understand it. I wouldn't give a dime to support a teaching that denied the presence of God in his universe and the fact that the human heart can know God through Jesus Christ. Now what is taught here is that the earth is a shadow of heaven.

Sin accepted, of course. Heaven shines downward and throws its shadows, and those shadows we call the earth and the things that are therein. I say sin accepted.

Wherever sin is found, it's a shadow of hell and not of heaven, and never can be of heaven. Sin is a disease and a deformity and a plague and a blight and a treason and a rebellion and an error and a sacrilege and a perversion. It's all of those things, and so it can be no part of heaven, for there's nothing of heaven in it and nothing in heaven like it.

Sin is a sinister presence in the universe which God has permitted to be here for a little while, but its days are limited and numbered by the determinate counsel and poor knowledge of God, and when his good pleasure comes, he is going to destroy sin from the universe and beat it and chase it out of his universe until there is no sin left. That's one thing, that earth is the shadow of heaven. And the other is that the body of the universe is one.

Genesis 1 in the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. Now, if I had said this before, I say it now without apology, that the universe is one. One creator, one universe.

God made the universe and he did not make it in everlasting contradiction to itself. He made it as one. He did not make several parts of the universe opposed to each other, but working harmoniously with each other.

And Christ taught this. Christ, when he was on earth, taught the unity of heaven and earth, and he held that everything had its spiritual counterpart. For that reason, he was as much at home on earth as he had been in heaven.

There's a great deal of unnecessary mourning over our Lord coming down to the earth. A great deal of unnecessary and lugubrious tears are being shed over our Lord becoming incarnated. My dear friend, our Lord could become incarnated in the form of a man without embarrassment and without difficulty, because when God made man in the first place, he made him in his own image.

And it was a simple matter for the God who had made the image to move into the image so that the incarnation of Christ is not a great difficulty at all. It's a mystery of godliness, but it's not hard to believe, though it's certainly impossible to understand. But Christ could be incarnated in the form of a man, and he could not have been incarnated in the form of an angel, because however high in the order of being the

angels may be, they were not said to be created in the image of God.

Man is created in the image of God, and therefore, when God came down to be incarnated, he fit down into the nature of man as neatly as a man's hands fit into a glove. And Jesus, our Lord, walked among men, flowers and trees and babies and women and men and horses and all these things just as naturally as he walked in heaven before he was incarnated, because heaven and earth in the sight of God are one. I say the only thing that separates from the moment is that sinister presence we call sin.

Just as a healthy man may be suddenly very ill, and all that prevents him from being a healthy man is the presence of certain microbes or bacteria or virus in his veins, so in the universe, heaven and earth are one. What further is present in the world now that virus we call sin? And by the blood of Jesus Christ and the power of the Spirit, when that is purged away from the world, it will be seen that heaven can shine down on the earth, I repeat without embarrassment, because God made both. Jesus walked among men, and he talked about the birds, and he showed how the very birds could preach a sermon that we people all ought to listen to.

He talked about the flowers and pointed his finger to the lily that grew yonder and said, That lily can teach you a lesson, for that lily grows in its beauty, and there isn't a man in all Palestine, not even Solomon, when he was arrayed in all of his splendor, could be as good-looking as this flower. And he said, God made that flower, and the flower had nothing to do with it. Therefore we give God the glory, and you stop worrying about yourself, because God made the flowers and now the Lord will take care of you.

And the wind and the water and light and life and growth and reward and punishment, all these things he talked about on earth, showing that they were projections downward of laws that were as old as God and that had their origin at the throne of God. So I wish and pray and hope that we Christians might get away from the notion that earth is under a shadow far away in some deep subterranean cave of God's universe and that somewhere far away shining in celestial splendor there is a city. But there is no connection between the two.

No, my friend, the devil would like to have us believe that, but I don't believe it for a minute. I believe that the Christian whose heart is alive and alert and sensitive to the light of God can see the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God, and he doesn't have to go to heaven to see it. I don't mean he sees visions in the night, wakes his wife and says, I just saw a vision.

I've never gone much for that thing. I never had a vision in my life. I never had a dream.

I couldn't explain by something I ate or something I had seen or didn't do. So I'm not talking about all this woozy stuff. I am only meaning and trying to say that the Christian who is inwardly alive and has the life of God in him will find himself at home among men and at home in heaven because he belongs in both, just as Jesus did.

Now, when Jesus Christ walked on the earth, he said he was in the bosom of the Father, and there was no contradiction between those two statements. He was in the bosom of the Father still. And when a Christian walks on the earth and tells his unbelieving friend, I live in the bosom of God, the unbelieving friend raises his eyebrows and shakes his head, and when he's not looking, makes a little signal as though there was something wrong with the Christian.

There's nothing wrong with the Christian at all. The Christian is simply telling the truth. He's walking on earth, but he's in the bosom of God nevertheless.

He's in the kingdom of God, and we are in God, and God is in you, said Christ, said Paul. Now, the Bible and nature bear the same signature upon them. The same signature, I say, is upon both, so that we can conclude that whoever made the one made the other.

Let's look again briefly at how nature is. We look up above us on a clear night and we see the stars. I tried to count them when I was younger and gave up the job, and I'm glad I did because science tells us that they are innumerable, that is, there are so many of them.

You look up and see a little white spot. You call it a star, but the scientists say that's not a star at all, but a galaxy. What is a galaxy? It's a collection of stars.

Now, how many stars? Nobody knows how many stars. We have instruments to know how many, but there must be billions upon multiplied billions of them out yonder. So when David looked up and saw the stars, it struck him how little he was in comparison with the world.

David got down on his knees with his little harp in his hand and sang himself a song to God. When I behold the heavens, the work of the hands, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? That, you see, that's just God's creation. But along comes man.

And man begins to study it and log it and weigh it and measure it all up there and create big instruments to see it so he can weigh it and measure it better. And we call that astronomy. Nobody was ever blessed by astronomy, but how many million farmers at night have walked across the meadow on their way home from the store, the little town away, and looked at the stars and in their heart thanked God they were alive and thanked God he was alive and up there.

You see, astronomy is what man has made out of the stars. And it's the same with flowers. God put the flowers everywhere.

Now, as I said at the opening of my series on worship, I believe that everything is here for a purpose and that God, being a God of reason, had a reasonable purpose for everything. I believe that God made flowers because he had some creatures down here made in his image, and he knew those creatures had an aesthetic sense. That is, they had ability to appreciate beauty.

So instead of God putting flowers down here and just making them ordinary, he made them so beautiful that they bring a gasp of delight when you see the first flowers in the spring. Well, those are flowers. Now, you look around at a flower and you say, that flower grew there without any help at all.

It couldn't even help itself. And you say, thank God he that made the flowers will keep me. But a botanist comes along and he breaks that thing down into petals and stamen and all the rest, and pretty soon you've got a big book that nobody likes.

You call that botany. And that's what you inflict upon young people in high school and college, making them swear quietly that they'll never look at a flower again. Instead of having God's beautiful world studded with God's still more beautiful flowers, you have a big book with fine print in it and some fellow boring into it at night trying to catch up so he can pass his test.

That's what we've done to God's flowers. We've turned it into botany. We've turned God's stars into astronomy.

And then there are the rocks and the hills and all the beautiful world that God made under his heavens. And we like to look at them. I grew up in the state of Pennsylvania, that fairyland.

I know now that it is, though I didn't know it then. I was too close to it to appreciate it. What you grow up with, you're not likely to appreciate so much as something you see later in life.

And I've seen all those hills and those little streams running among the hills and those pine-clad mountains pushing up against the sky. And I saw all that. Those are rocks and hills and they're beautiful.

And along comes some fellow with a microscope and a little hammer, and he is a geologist and he teaches geology. And so we have, instead of rocks and hills, we have geology. Then there were the birds.

We used to see the birds, the birds that came in the springtime early and laid their eggs and hatched and sang among the branches and went back to the south again when the bitter autumn winds began to blow and the brown discouraged leaves were flying all about. Well, those were birds. And I used to like to see the birds.

I used to like to see the pigeons come wheel and light on the peak of the barn and coo and puff out their necks at each other. I was enjoying the birds. But you give a bird and a rabbit to a professor and he turns it into zoology and you don't have a thing left, you know.

Now, that's the way to do in nature. Nature has reduced a system instead of enjoyed for itself. God gave Adam the Garden of Eden and the trees and the view and said, Here, it's yours.

Help yourself. Just take care of it. But help yourself.

It's yours. Then man sinned and when Adam, if he ever got back to see it, he had his book under his arm. And all of that beauty is reduced to astronomy and botany and geology and zoology and some of the other.

Now, they do that same thing with the scriptures. God gave us the word of the Lord. It's a letter from the home.

We used to sing a little song back in the camp meeting days. I have letters from my father in my hand, in my hand written by my elder brother. They are grand, oh, so grand.

Wasn't a very good hymnology, but a wonderful truth that we have a letter from God in our hands. Give, put that in the hands of a professor with big glasses and very shortly he has theology that nobody will read. A student in the Christian college wrote me one time and said, Will you please help me? Am I backsliding or what's going wrong? I should suppose theoretically that the study of theology would be the most thrilling, the most delightful, the most enjoyable thing in the world because theology is the study of God and the ways of God.

I would assume that it ought to be a delight, but this professor makes it impossible. I can't even enjoy it. I don't want to hear it.

Well, I wrote back and explained it the best I could because I'd been up against that, too, in my life. So you see, the Bible is here, the letters from God to his people. And then we take it and reduce it and systematize it and pretty soon we have it so you have to have a good education to understand it at all.

And the Lord never meant that. He meant that all of his children, all of his children, this continent, my brothers and sisters, was conquered and settled by people who had never been more than through grade school. McDuffie's reader was about all the education they had, but they could read and they did have translations given to them by men who were scholars.

And so they lived on those good translations and never even knew those anything else. Simplicity and childlikeness. God hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes.

And I have met many, a little old lady dressed in her old-fashioned black who hasn't had a thing up to date nor the latest fad for twenty-seven, twenty-eight, or thirty-five, forty years. She's in style back there, but not in style up here. And she may think that's spiritual.

It isn't. It just happens that way. But I've seen those little old ladies and they'd quit living in the earth at all.

Oh, they cooked and sewed and cleaned house and went to store and all that, but they weren't living here. They were walking that far off the sidewalk, living with God all the time. They were not brilliant people and they were not well-educated people, but they were people who looked out on God's truth and saw it as a child sees flowers.

Looked at God's truth and saw it as David saw stars. Looked at God's truth and saw it as Isaiah saw the mountains. Direct, unmediated, unsophisticated, unspoiled.

The Lord said there was a pattern in the mount. There is in heaven a sanctuary, he said, a true tabernacle, where there is an altar and a mercy seat and a high priest. And he said that if Jesus were on earth, he wouldn't be a priest.

He said he couldn't be a priest because there were priests already here on the earth after the order of Levi. But he said, according to the Old Testament scriptures themselves, there has to come a priest who is above the Levitical priests after the order of Melchizedek and this Jesus is the one. And he said this Jesus has a more excellent ministry than Levi.

Levi had the tabernacle and if you discipline yourself a little bit, if you haven't been spoiled by Reader's Digest, if you discipline yourself a little bit and settle down to get quiet and read, actually read, and you'll read the book of Leviticus and the book of Exodus and get acquainted with it and see what it says, you'll see how beautiful that was. There was something utterly beautiful about that Old Testament tabernacle, the old Levitical order. It was spoiled and stained by blood everywhere for sin had spoiled and stained the world and it took blood to wash the world.

So all through the Old Testament order there was blood, blood of lambs and blood of pigeons and blood of goats. But it was all pointing to the Lamb of God that should come to take away the sin of the world. Now, says the man of God, this whole tabernacle has been lifted and it is now in heaven and we have a priest there who offered himself as the Lamb to end the sacrifice of all lambs forever.

We have an altar there, not the altar in Jerusalem but the altar in heaven. We have a Lamb there to take the place of all the beasts that were slain on Jewish altars. And we have an altar of incense there where

our Lord pleads to take the place of that transient altar of incense in the old tabernacle in Judea.

This is what is taught here, my friends. It is taught that Jesus Christ is the true priest and strictly he is the only priest there is. In a secondary sense, all of his people are priests.

In a primary sense, there is only one priest and that is Jesus Christ, the Lord. He is the high priest. Now, what does all this mean to us? It means that this glorious remedy remains now.

This glorious remedy remains now. In old Jewish days, once a year, the priest came dressed in his resplendent robes and with blood not his own, he went in through a veil so sacred that it was only necessary to remove once a year and sprinkle blood on a mercy seat between the wings of the cherubim where glowed the fiery Shekinah. But all that was fulfilled when our Lord gave up the ghost and said, It is finished and died on a cross, yonder.

That is what is taught here. That is what is taught here. And then what is taught here also is that when this happened, Jesus Christ washed the heavens, so there is nothing between man and God now if man will believe it.

That by the blood of the Lamb, God washed the heavens so that there is a friendly heaven arching over us now. Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, said Jesus. The Spirit and the Bride say come, and whoever is athirst, let him come.

And all that hear say come, says the last book of the Bible. So the blood of the Lamb has by blood washed away the evil that kept us away from God. And now whoever will come, may come, regardless of how dark may be his stain and how far off he may be from God.

Any prodigal is the same distance from God as any other prodigal. We have been hearing of rapists and murderers and all the rest. More recently, it seems to me, in the last few months than ever since I can remember in my time.

And yet, that rapist who rapes and kills there in the park in the dark of the night, is no further off from God than that proud businessman surrounded by his adoring family who reads Shakespeare and listens to Beethoven. All are sinners. And all have come short of the glory of God.

And we're all without hope and without God in the world. But there is yet hope in God if we'll believe. Because the Scriptures tell us that there is a way open now through a fountain in the house of David and a way open through the rending of his flesh.

And the rapist in the park, though we shudder at the thought of the terrible, terrible act he's committed, he can come home if he will come. He's a sinner, and the man who is up and out, he can come, too. The cultured sinner can come, and the uncultured, base sinner can come.

All can come. Because heaven and earth are united. And Jesus Christ has washed away the division, the difference.

Now we can come. Sin's still loose in the universe like a virus still in the body. And the world is sick, desperately sick.

But Jesus is the physician of souls, and he can cure us and bring him to himself by his blood. Our Father used to sing a song. It isn't in our book, but it runs like this.

Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain, could give the guilty conscience peace or take away the stain. But Christ, the heavenly Lamb, takes all our guilt away, a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they. My soul looks back to see the burdened office bare while hanging on the cursed tree and knows my sins were there.

Believing we rejoice to see the curse removed, we bless the Lamb with cheerful voice and sing his bleeding love. We ought to sing that song often, for this is our hope for this world and our hope for the world to come. A priest, an altar, a temple, a tabernacle, a shrine, and an advocate above, a Savior by the throne of love.

This we Christians have. What bothers me is how we can keep so quiet about it, and why it is that we can take it so soberly, almost sadly. It seems to me that we Christians ought to be the happiest people in all the wide world.

Now I want you to sing. I don't know for the grave what song is announced, but I'm sure that these musicians as well as the congregation can sing anything as easily as they can sing or play anything else. So I'm going to ask you to sing number 311, 311, which is considered to be probably the greatest hymn ever written.

And it's about what I preached about this morning. Let's sing it reverently as our closing feature.

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