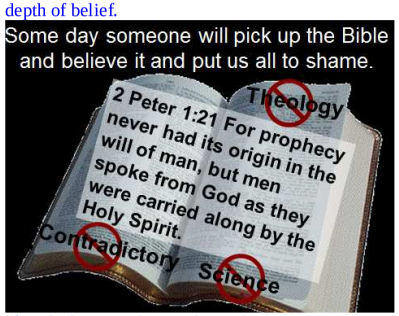
Prelude "Indescribable"
Announcements, registration, prayer/praise requests, silent prayer preparing for worship.
Lighting of candles.
Call to Worship
Hymn: "Thy Word" – 272
Prayer of Praise and Adoration:
Let us pray. Dear Lord we come to you this morning praising you for your Holy Word. We praise you that it is a timeless word and is just as effective in lighting our path now as it was when the Holy Spirit inspired its writing. We praise you that it is a living word and that you speak to us through it by the Holy Spirit, its author. We praise you that it is an infallible word upon which we can trust our lives and our eternity. And we stand in awe that when we open your word we are walking on holy ground. And now we lift up this pray that Jesus taught us to pray from your holy word.
The Lord's Prayer:
Matt 6:9 Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
11 Give us this day our daily bread.
12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (KJV)

Statement of Faith, Gloria Patri, Call to Confession, Prayer of Confession, Words of Assurance.
Hymn (Jesus Loves Even Me - 357), Offertory sentence
Offertory music – "Devotion"
Presentation of Tithes and offering
The Doxology
Special Music – I Can Only Imagine
Children's time
Scripture Lesson, Sermon

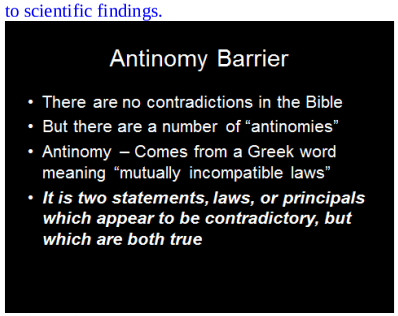
We have had many excellent guest speakers over the past few weeks. I have especially enjoyed the sermons delivered by Jim Taylor. They were solid Biblical teaching, with moving, humorous, and thought provoking stories thrown in. But today I am afraid you are stuck with me. They say "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger", so you will at least be stronger when we leave for the brunch. Speaking of brunch, do you remember the corn flakes commercial that had the catch phrase "Taste them again for the first time?" I believe it starting running in 1991. Kellogg's knew that everyone had eaten corn flakes during their childhood, but somehow we all outgrew corn flakes. Kellogg's commercial was aimed at adults to try it again for the first time as an adult.

Kellogg's realized that we were stuck in a rut in our thinking about their breakfast cereal. I think we also get stuck in a rut in our approach to the Bible. The purpose of this sermon is to challenge us to get out of our rut and taste the Bible again with a renewed reverence for the Word, with an acceptance of our limitations, and an increased depth of belief.

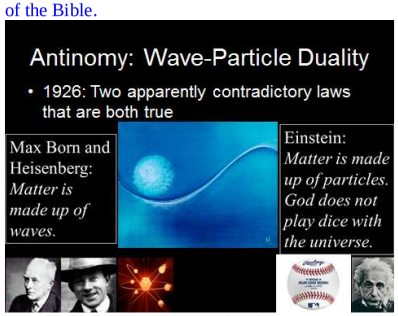


If I asked anyone here today, I think you would agree that the Bible is the inspired word of God. You might even quote 2 Peter 1:21. But while we all give lip service to our belief, I fear that we pick and choose what to believe in the Bible. If a collection of verses seem contradictory to us, we tend to pick what we like and censor the rest. If a verse seems contrary to our theology, we pass it by. If a verse doesn't align with our understanding of science we tend to dismiss it.
A theologian once wrote "Some day someone will pick up the Bible and believe it and put us all to shame." Will you be that person? That is the challenge today.

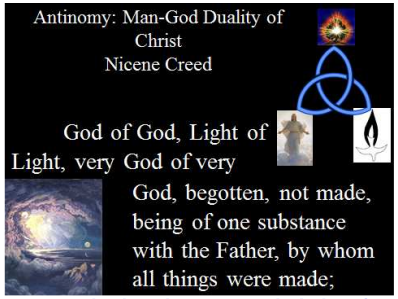
I want us to work through three barriers to belief that I have struggled with:
- How to deal with the apparent contradictions in the Bible. Theologians call these apparent contradictions "antinomies".
-How to break out of dogmatic thinking and believe Scripture that seems to fly against one's theology.
-And, how to believe Scripture that seems counter to scientific findings.



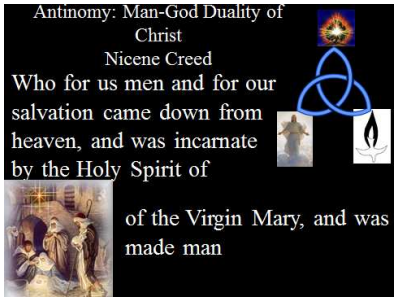
Before I flip to the next slide, I guess I have to explain that back when I was young and didn't have anything better to do, I got a Ph.D. in physics. Before we look at antinomies in the Bible, I think it would be useful to see that they also appear outside of the Bible.



Let's look at an antinomy in the physics community that came up in 1926.
When you throw a baseball, classical Newtonian physics can be used to very precisely predict its trajectory. But by 1926 scientists discovered that one could not map the trajectory of a small particle such as an electron in that same way. While an electron is very, very small, it seemed to actually be spread out in space more like a wave than a particle, and the best that one could do was to predict the probability of observing the electron at a particular point in space time. It was impossible to predict its trajectory with certainty. Albert Einstein initially thought these new theories, that matter was really made up of waves rather than particles, was nonsense. He said that God does not play dice with the universe.
This is an example of an antinomy. You have two laws of physics. One works for baseballs. One works for electrons. But they seem very counter to each other because one assumes matter is made up of particles and the other assumes that matter is made up of waves.
Ultimately these scientists did the experiments in the laboratory and the math on the caulk boards to reconcile these apparently contradictory laws. They found that matter really has a dual wave-particle nature, but that as the mass of the particle gets large, like a baseball, the wave nature diminishes to be immeasurable, so it behaves like a particle.
Now the point of subjecting you to this bit of high school physics is to show that even in the field of science, we run across laws of physics which on the surface appear to be contradictory, but which are actually both true if you dig down deep enough and do the math.
Now remember what I told you. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. You will be stronger when we quit for brunch. Now let's turn to antinomies in the Bible.



We just spoke about the wave-particle duality of matter. There is another duality that we find in the Bible. The Bible teaches that Jesus is both God and man. Not half man and half God but 100% God and 100% man. On the surface, this appears to be a contradiction. In the world of physics when we run into antinomies we sometimes go into the laboratory and do more experiments to resolve the contradiction. It has been said that church history is the laboratory of theology. We can sometimes get insight into God's Word by looking to church history. In the case of the God/Man duality of Christ, it has hotly debated and largely agreed to at the Nicene Council of 325. We read these words from the Nicene Creed today. It is a clear affirmation of our belief in the Scripture that claims that Jesus is God. Today most Christians accept this ancient creed.



This ancient creed also gives a clear statement that Jesus became man. To a certain extent, we take comfort in knowing that our church fathers argued the point and eventually came to a general agreement. But much more importantly, we accept what the Bible teaches and trust that God has done the math. Jesus truly was and is both God and man. Unfortunately many of the antinomies in the Bible

have not yet been worked out to a united conclusion in church history. That brings us to a related topic of Theological barriers to accepting Scripture.

You remember the story of Moses seeing a bush in the distance that burned and burned without getting burned up. As Moses approached the bush, he heard God speak: Ex 3:5 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." (NIV) Moses was walking on holy ground. He was only allowed to come so close.

This is the case with you and me as we approach these deep truths of the Bible. We are walking on holy ground and we are only permitted to come so close. We see somewhat in the distance that Christ is God but Christ is man. We see "whosoever believes" alongside "predestined before creation". We see a loving, sacrificial, and merciful God preparing a home for us in heaven but at the same time we see a jealous and vengeful God who demands justice and has prepared an eternal hell. We see a God who allows bad things to happen to good people but we see a God who works all things together for the good of those who love Him. We see a sovereign, all-knowing, all-powerful, all sufficient, omnipresent God who at the very same time responds to our prayers and works through us to accomplish His purposes.

Moses had walked across the desert to see why the bush burned and burned without burning up. He probably wished he could run up and peer directly into the burning bush to see it's secretes. Our inquiring minds also want to ignore God's command. We would love to run up and peer directly into the mind of God and understand the mystery of the God/Man, the mystery of predestination and free will, the mystery of a sovereign God who responds to prayer, and on and on. Sadly, many in church history have tried to do exactly that. Many have not treated this ground as holy, and it has sadly divided Christians, split churches and denominations, and tainted our beliefs.

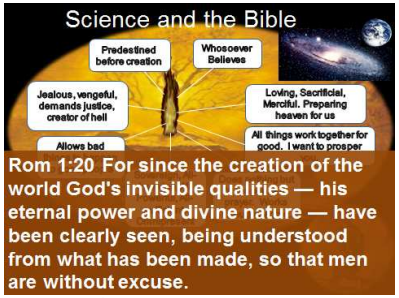
We need to understand our limits. We need to understand that God's ways are higher than our ways. Isa 55:9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways

This passage from Job puts it very well. Job 11:7 "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? 8 They are higher than the heavens — what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave-what can you know? 9 Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.

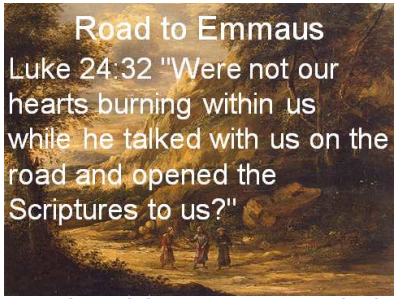
One of the hardest transitions in my career was when I moved from the technical track to the management track. I used to take pride in being the top dog on the technical ladder. When a business problem needed to be solved, I would be the one most on top of the current computer technologies and the one that would implement the solution. When I moved into management I soon became responsible for too many people and too many projects to say up on the latest technologies. I had to let go. I had to learn to trust and accept some very smart people in my department who did know the latest technologies. I had to learn to quit leaning on my own technical knowledge and to trust in people who were smarter than me. This feeling of faith and dependence was very uncomfortable for me, but it was the key to progressing in my career. I think we need to approach the Bible that same way. We do not have to understand it all, We need a relationship with the One who does. I think that is what Paul was getting at in these verses. 2 Cor 12:2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know — God knows. 3 And I know that this man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— 4 was caught up to paradise. Paul was given a vision of heaven like no one else. In drinking in the awesomeness of the vision, he apparently did not think to pinch himself to see if he was in the body or out of the body. Some in Paul's day argued about if the resurrection from the dead was in the body or out of the body. Paul gave us instruction about that elsewhere but he refused to share what he did not know from this rapture experience of his. He said "I don't know, God knows". Implicit in this is an acceptance that Paul does not know, and does not need to know, because God knows.

I think that is the attitude that we must take regarding these deep truths of God. We must accept that what the Bible tells us is true, and that these deep truths are on Holy Ground, and we must accept them without fully understanding or reconciling them, and THAT IS OK, we don't need to know because God knows.

Our tendency when we approach this Holy Ground is to approach it from only one direction. We have a melting pot of denominations here at Jenkins Church. We each bring along a certain theological bias. And then we all of our common theological bias as Cumberland Presbyterians. As we approach this Holy Ground we tend to stick to our side of the bush. The one where we are theologically most comfortable. My challenge to you is to recognize that while God will only allow us to approach so closely to this holy ground, he will let us walk around the bush. God is awesome from every angle and we dishonor Him by picking some scripture over others or from letting denominational dogma take precedence over the Scripture. As you walk around this bush, you are unlikely to change your basic theology. I think that CP theology is about as sound as it gets. But you will definitely get deeper insights into the awesomeness of God. Be willing to accept the Scripture that you do not understand, or which does not fit neatly into your theology. Accept that you don't need to know because God knows.



At the risk of getting a rather crowded slide, let's put the universe onto this same slide. In addition to speaking to us through the Scripture God speaks to us through His creation. From Rom 1:20 we read. I think that scientists bring honor to God as they study the complexity of this vast universe. It is my belief that God is very active in creation and that it is His conscious will that holds it all together. God's will is so extraordinarily complex, so orderly, and so perfect that only mathematics could begin to let us grasp it. That is what scientist do. They come up with mathematical models that describe the elegance with which God holds the universe together, and I believe that honors God. Where science and the Bible conflict is with drawing conclusions from what is seen and measured. For example, science takes fossils of what we call dinosaur bones and carbon date them to be millions of years old - older than one would expect from the Bible. I think we need to approach this in exactly the same way that we approach antinomies in the Bible. I don't know God knows. We could contort the scripture in an attempt to match the science. I have tried this and can tell you that it does not lead to any spiritual satisfaction. Plus we already saw this morning how science is a moving target. In 1926 our whole scientific notion of matter had to change. Albert Einstein put it this way. He said that for every answer provided by science, 10 new questions are uncovered. So it does not make sense to try to reconcile God's eternal unchanging truths with a science that is constantly changing. We can speculate about the holes in our science. For example, one easy reconciliation is that God simply created an aged universe. That would solve most of our problems. I think God probably did something even more awesome than that but it is hidden from us on holy ground. We need to simply accept that the scripture is true. I don't think we need to argue with the scientists. They are telling us what they measured. But we know with confidence that God has already done the math to reconcile it, and He knows so we don't have to.



Let me close with this scripture. You remember the passage where Jesus had been raised from the dead and he began to walk along the road to Emmaus without telling them who He was. And then in Luke 24:27 we read that beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Jesus eventually revealed his identify to them and disappeared and then the two disciples said "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Now that Jesus has ascended, The Holy Spirit has taken on that role. If we will refrain from grieving Him and will be quick to repent when we do, He will be just as real to you as Jesus was on that road to Emmaus. You know that He is speaking when your heart burns within you concerning the authenticity and truth of God's word. The praise band is going to lead us in our response song. Note that one of the lyrics is "I believe because He (the Holy Spirit) made me believe."

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, we pray that your Holy Spirit will move within each of us to impress upon us the holiness and infallibility of your Word. Let Him enable us to sing this song of affirmation from the depths of our soul. Amen.

Hymn (The Bond of Love - 281)

Benediction:

Dear Lord we pray for your blessings upon the brunch that has been prepared for us. Go with us to that fellowship gathering filling each of our hearts with a love for you and a love for each other. And now, may we depart from here with a renewed reverence for your Word and an excitement about tasting it again. Amen.

*Taking the light into the world
*Passing the blessing
*Postlude