

[DELIVER SLOWLY]

So before I start, I want everyone to know that I've chosen to speak on a topic that I find fascinating, and that if I say anything that you don't understand, either because I used words you aren't familiar with, or because I'm speaking too quickly, please just shout out, and let me know.

How many of you chose to do something today? ... I bet most of you chose which cereal you were going to eat for breakfast this morning, or even whether you were going to have cereal at all. On a little bit more significant level, you all had a choice whether to obey the directions your counselors gave you today, and you had a choice to respond in friendship and love, or to respond in anger or sarcasm when people got on your nerves or were just plain mean during the course of the day. We are faced with hundreds of decisions every day, and part of a Christian worldview is that we, as human beings created in God's image, are truly free to make each of those decisions for ourselves. You will hear many challenges to this worldview, and I hope to be able to answer several of those challenges tonight, but first I'd like to start with a story. Actually, interesting side note, before I get in to the meat of the talk. Myth and logic both come from Greek words that meant truth. Myth originally meant truth conveyed through story, and logos (or logic) originally meant truth conveyed through reasoning. While myth has (sadly) lost much of that original meaning, it can still be used to convey truth through stories that are not true in the sense of a "true story," but true in the deeper sense of the worldview that they convey, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to tell this story.

How many of you have seen The Lord of the Rings movies, or read the books? ... Are any of you familiar with The Silmarillion? It's another set of stories that take place in Middle Earth, and all the stories of Middle Earth were J.R.R. Tolkien's attempt at a mythology that could serve as a more fantastic history for our own world. The story I'm going to share is part of the creation story for that mythology and describes the creation of the dwarven race.

It is told that in their beginning the Dwarves were made by Aulë [one of the Valar ... angelic beings who are the rulers of Middle-earth] in the darkness of Middle-earth; for so greatly did Aulë desire the coming of the Children [Elves and Men], to have learners to whom he could teach his lore and his crafts, that he was unwilling to await the fulfilment of the designs of Ilúvatar [The name used for God in Tolkien's mythology]. And Aulë made the Dwarves even as they still are, because the forms of the Children who were to come were unclear to his mind, and because the power of Melkor [The most powerful of the Valar, who rebelled against Ilúvatar] was yet over the Earth; and he wished therefore that they should be strong and unyielding. But fearing that the other Valar might blame his work, he wrought in secret: and he made first the Seven Fathers of the Dwarves in a hall under the mountains in Middle-earth. Now Ilúvatar knew what was done, and in the very hour that Aulë's work was complete, and he was pleased, and began to instruct the Dwarves in the speech that he had devised for them, Ilúvatar spoke to him; and Aulë heard his voice and was silent. And the voice of Ilúvatar said to him: 'Why hast thou done this? Why dost thou attempt a thing which thou knowest is beyond thy power and thy authority? For thou hast from me as a gift thy own being only, and no more; and therefore the creatures of thy hand and mind can live only by that being, moving when thou thinkest to move them, and if thy thought be elsewhere, standing idle. Is that thy desire?' Then Aulë answered: 'I did not desire such lordship. I desired things other than I am, to love and to teach them, so that they too might perceive the beauty of Eä [in other words, the created universe], which thou hast caused to be. For it seemed to me that there is great room in Arda for many things that might rejoice in it, yet it is for the most part empty still, and dumb. And in my impatience I have fallen into folly. Yet the making of thing is in my heart from my own making by thee; and the child of little understanding that

makes a play of the deeds of his father may do so without thought of mockery, but because he is the son of his father. But what shall I do now, so that thou be not angry with me for ever? As a child to his father, I offer to thee these things, the work of the hands which thou hast made. Do with them what thou wilt. But should I not rather destroy the work of my presumption?' Then Aulë took up a great hammer to smite the Dwarves; and he wept. But Ilúvatar had compassion upon Aulë and his desire, because of his humility; and the Dwarves shrank from the hammer and were afraid, and they bowed down their heads and begged for mercy. And the voice of Ilúvatar said to Aulë: 'Thy offer I accepted even as it was made. Dost thou not see that these things have now a life of their own, and speak with their own voices? Else they would not have flinched from thy blow, nor from any command of thy will.' Then Aulë cast down his hammer and was glad, and he gave thanks to Ilúvatar, saying: 'May Eru [another name for Ilúvatar] bless my work and amend it!' But Ilúvatar spoke again and said: 'Even as I gave being to the thoughts of the Ainur [or the angels] at the beginning of the World, so now I have taken up thy desire and given to it a place therein; but in no other way will I amend thy handiwork, and as thou hast made it, so shall it be. But I will not suffer this: that these should come before the Firstborn of my design, nor that thy impatience should be rewarded. They shall sleep now in the darkness under stone, and shall not come forth until the Firstborn have awakened upon Earth; and until that time thou and they shall wait, though long it seem. But when the time comes I will awaken them, and they shall be to thee as children; and often strife shall arise between thine and mine, the children of my adoption and the children of my choice.'

This story beautifully mirrors our own creation, as told in the first chapters of Genesis, and answers, or at least hints at the answer to, one of the first questions people ask when confronted with the Christian belief that God created us with free will. That first question is WHY would God choose to create us with free will when it gives us the ability to do so much evil, and this the story answers beautifully. How many of you have ever played with Lego's? Did you actually act out stories with your Lego guys? How about play with those little plastic army men, or GI Joe's? And how many of you still do that? One thing that you'll notice as you get older is that when you're the only one playing with those 5, or 10, or 20 guys, it's just not as fun when you're the one who's making ALL the characters speak, it's always more fun to have someone to play with. How much more true must that be for God? If He had created us without free will ... without the ability to make our decisions, we would be nothing more than a giant planet of Lego people. Of course we'd always do what He wanted us to do...but only because we only thought of things that He thought, and only do the things that He forced us to do. If you want someone to love you, you don't surround yourself with your entire collection of Lego people ... you surround yourself with friends. God created us to love Him, and to learn from Him, but real love, and real learning, only come from the ability to make your own decisions. In Genesis 1, we are told that God said,

"Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them, " and then later in Genesis 3, we are told that God was actually walking in the Garden of Eden with them, *"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"*

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

God created us to be in loving fellowship with Him, but ever since that time we have been in rebellion against Him.

Now I'd like to move on from questions of the "I don't understand why?" variety, to direct challenges to a belief in free will. The first of these that I want to respond to is the one that you are more likely to encounter in a secular (not religious) college or high school, and the one which has most strongly challenged my own faith. From psychologists, neurologists, biologists, and many others who study the human brain you will hear the claim that our minds are nothing more than extraordinarily complex computers ... computers which theoretically could be controlled by someone who understood the inner workings well enough, and which could eventually be downloaded onto your desktop computer, allowing you (and your other computerized copies) to live on in the world of the Internet without any need for a real body. From many who disbelieve in the spiritual reality of the universe you will hear the claim that the final outcome of the universe, and every single event leading up to it was determined in the instant it began. This argument has been around for hundreds of years ... and a more modern version, taking into account the findings of quantum physics is that our universe is just one of many universes, splitting apart from each other like branches on a tree, playing through every single possible version of the universe. Quite a few movies are based on this idea, as it certainly allows for all sorts of interesting plot twists (for example.....what if you could somehow travel to a different universe in which your parents had won the lottery, and you were suddenly very, very rich?). What it doesn't allow for is the sort of universe in which God is still active in his Creation, and it certainly doesn't allow for free will. Both of these claims center on the same two basic assumptions, and so I'll try and answer both at the same time. The first of these assumptions is that the very smallest building blocks that make up our universe will always behave the same way, or that their behavior is caused by another physical event; and the second is that spiritual beings (God, angels, demons, our own spirit) either don't exist or have no ability to influence the physical world. Obviously these are pretty heavy attacks, leveled at the core of a Christian worldview, so if our faith is to have any substance, it's important that we be able to answer these challenges. After all, in the words of 1 Corinthians 15:16-19, *"For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."* **[explain this in more contemporary English]**. Fortunately, these attacks are based on scientific claims, and we can answer them with science. The claims of both those who view the human brain as nothing more than computers, and of those who believe that the outcome of the entire universe is predetermined by the laws of physics are based on a classical understanding of physics in which every event in the universe's history can be traced back along a chain of cause and effect to the universe's creation, assuming we understand well enough the laws that govern the way the universe works. While this view is fairly accurate on a large scale (we can backtrack and even predict the movements of stars and planets with amazing accuracy), the study of quantum mechanics has shown that this simply does not hold true with the smallest building blocks of our universe. Some of you are probably familiar with C.S. Lewis (author of the Chronicles of Narnia), and he expressed the impact that this should have on our beliefs quite well in one of his essays on theology. *"Now it will be noticed that if this theory is true we have really admitted something other than Nature. If the movements of the individual units are events 'on their own', events which do not interlock with all other events, then these movements are not part of Nature. It would be, indeed, too great a shock to our habits to describe them as super-natural. I think we should have to call them sub-natural. But all our confidence that Nature has no doors, and no reality outside herself for doors to open on, would have disappeared. There is apparently something outside her, the Subnatural; it is indeed from this Subnatural that all events and all 'bodies' are, as it were, fed into her. And clearly if she thus has a back door opening on the Subnatural, it is quite on the cards that she may also have a front door opening on the Supernatural-and events might be fed into her at that door too."*

[paraphrase now]

In other words, while an attempt to explain away miracles, and human will, as a side-effect of quantum mechanics would be to deny the spiritual side of God's creation just as much as to take the view that events are strictly predetermined by physics, the simple fact that events not governed by the physical causes can happen at all removes the possibility of any scientific argument against the existence of the spiritual realm on the grounds that there is no “wobble room” through which spiritual beings could change the course of events in our physical world. The other variation of the attack, mentioned above, is based on the idea that our universe is just one universe in a huge collection of universes playing out every single possible way in which a universe could turn out, **[insert combination lock metaphor here]**. While this argument is espoused by many scientists, **it is not a scientific argument**, but rather a philosophical one. Even if there were millions upon millions of universes, some containing versions of me with pink hair, or wielding a lightsaber, or in which cows developed purple fur, rather than brown fur, we have no way of EVER testing whether they exist or not. With that in mind, I think it's time to move on to the theologically stickier question, knowing that while there is no “scientific proof of God” any attempt at a scientific disproof of God, or of free will, crosses the boundary from science into philosophical guessing.

The second challenge to free will comes not from scientific quarters, but rather from theological quarters, and stems from a belief that God's plan for the universe is so comprehensive, and so hands on, that even if we are theoretically able to make our own decisions, God knows us so well that He already knows what decision we are going to make, thousands of years before we're ever born. The problem with this is, we don't really have free will if our behavior is as predictable through laws (even laws known only to God) governing the spiritual realm, as the movements of the planets are through the laws which govern the physical realm. As far as the existence of free will is concerned, such a belief is no better than the belief that we are nothing more than complex computers; however, this is a sticky topic, because the Bible **strongly** emphasizes two points which, at first glance are in conflict with each other, so I'm going to do my best to point out the key parts of both points, and build out of that something which makes sense. Before I dive in, let's take a look at few passages from scripture.
Ephesians 1:11 *“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will”*
Ephesians 2:10 *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”*
John 6:44 *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

The first two passages make it abundantly clear that God **does** have a plan, and that He has predetermined that certain things should occur. This is made more clear by the numerous promises He makes throughout the Bible...for example, in the story of Abraham in the Old Testament, it is clear that God intended to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation, well before the nation of Israel ever came about. But before we are too quick to say that the existence of a divine plan is evidence against free will, we need to remember that our God is Almighty, and that it would be the height of arrogance to assume He needed **our** help to accomplish His designs. More importantly, saying that it was God's plan for the world to become marred and full of sin is to attribute evil intentions to God. The passage from John would seem to be sending a clearer message that our free will to choose to serve God has somehow been impaired; however, once again, a closer read reveals something different. Reading from 2 Peter 1:3-4 puts the verse in context. *“as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”* These two verses together give a more complete picture of the puzzle. When we fell in the garden and became sinful beings, our very nature as human beings was hardened against God, and we lost the ability and desire

to seek Him. Just as God's nature as a perfect and holy being prevents Him from performing acts of evil, so too our nature as fallen and sinful beings prevented us from seeking Him. We were still free to do as we pleased, but our very nature stood in the way of our relationship with Him. That is of course, until He chose to free us from that bondage to sin, and He called ALL of us to Him through Jesus's sacrifice for us on the cross. We are still free to commit sinful acts, after all, we are still fallen beings, but God extended to us the ability and the desire to seek after Him as well, so that we need not be eternally separated from His love. In that context we can now see the verse from John 6, not as somehow declaring that God chooses who will serve and who won't, and that those of us who aren't chosen will be punished for a decision that wasn't ours, but rather as declaring that without His sacrifice, none of us could draw near to Him and that because of it that choice is now open to all of us who so desire. Now I want to look at three passages clearly showing that we are responsible for our actions, something which only makes sense if we are truly the ones making our decisions, and aren't just Lego men being played with by a being far greater than ourselves.

From Joshua 24:15 *"And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose lands you dwell, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*
From Luke 6:46 *"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"*

And finally, from the story of Job, *'One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"*

Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, 19 when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said:

*"Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart.*

*The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
may the name of the LORD be praised."*

In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.'

Over and over again, the point is clear. We have the choice, and the responsibility to decide, whether to obey or to disobey. It doesn't make sense for Jesus to become frustrated with His disciples if as God it was in His will to make them do whatever suited His needs. Likewise, it simply doesn't make sense that God would allow Job to be tested in that manner if He was the one controlling Job's behavior, nor would it be significant that Job did not charge God with wrongdoing if it was simply because God was choosing to keep Job's mouth shut. We, and no one else, **are** responsible for our own actions. God certainly has a plan, and it's obviously a beautifully, marvelously intricate plan, but He also doesn't require our cooperation to bring it about, though we are showing love for Him whenever we choose to carry out his will. Everything that comes to pass happens through His design, and even when we make evil decisions, He can turn them to good.....remember the story of Joseph. The evil his brothers committed in selling him to slavery were the result of human sin, not God's actions. If God had somehow imposed a mental block or brainwashed all the brothers they would have been no more than puppets (like Aulë's dwarves, before Iluvatar breathed life into them).

In our search for knowledge and understanding of God and the universe we live in, there are some things we will never understand during this life, and it's **okay** that we understand only in part, for we are still children in God's eyes, and we can choose to trust Him and wait for the rest to be revealed. In 1 Corinthians 13:9-12, we are told *“For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”*

That's all I really have to talk about tonight, but if you have questions, I would be delighted to answer them for you, either right after campfire, or tomorrow during free time, or you can just ask your very own counselors tonight, during devo's. Let's close in prayer.