

Who is This God?

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, well, good morning, everyone. It's lovely to see you. Lovely to see some new faces as well this morning. You're so welcome with us. My name's Graham. I'm the pastor of the church here. And let me just invite you to turn back to those verses in John chapter 5.

If you need to scroll on your phone to find them, then please do that. If you need to use the contents page of the Bibles in front of you, then please do that as well to get God's words open in front of us.

So there's a man who used to be the school chaplain down at Worcester College in Oxford called Tom Wright. And his pupils used to come up to him and they'd say, Mr. Wright, listen, I don't believe in God.

And slightly provocatively yet lovingly, he'd reply and he'd say, well, okay. Why don't you describe to me this God that you don't believe in?

Which I think is a cracking question, isn't it, in response to that? Put the ball back in your court kind of question. Let me ask you, how would you answer that question this morning? Who is this God?

[1 : 1 4] Now, it was Julie Andrews, wasn't it, who sang that song about the beginning being a very good place to start. You know that song? And it's true, isn't it? As you open page one of the Bible, what kind of God are we instinctively expecting?

Well, we're expecting a God who creates and purely because of that demands something in return.

In other words, we're expecting a God who deals with his creatures, not relationally, but contractually. In other words, if we perform well for him and in his eyes, he will reward us and he will affirm us.

But if we do bad, he is a creator who will punish us and dismiss us. It's tit for tat. It's I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine.

As we find ourselves caught up in a spiritual and moral survival of the fittest competition. As we come to the opening page of the Bible, that is the God that I think as human beings we are instinctively expecting.

[2 : 2 9] And you see, that's often the version of God that pupils used to describe to Tom Wright when he used to ask them to describe the God that they didn't believe in. And when he heard that response, his response back to the people was, do you know what?

I don't believe in that God either. You see, the God of the Bible is delightfully different to and doggedly defiant of all of our man-made shallow assumptions about who he is.

This God who created the world. And if you think about it, he didn't have to create the world. It's not like he gets anything from it.

He needs it. No, no, no. This God is totally self-sufficient. But this God speaks and creation happens. This God who created the world, who gave beauty to it, who gave diversity to it.

If you think about it, God could have just made us all as human beings to survive on one food source. Is it not amazing that God has such a variety of foods in his world for us to eat?

[3 : 44] Not because God had to, but because it brought God delight to. This is the God of the Bible. Now, you might be asking yourself, why does that matter?

Let me put it to you that who you understand God to be or not to be profoundly trickles down the streams of your life and it affects everything else.

Right? Maybe think of it like this. I don't know if this is helpful, but we'll go for it. Okay. I had a fellow parent tell me recently about a school that used to have a really bad reputation. Right?

You know how it goes. Poor exam results. Pupils feeling unsupported. Teachers coming at their job with low morale. That kind of thing. Okay. It used to have a really bad reputation.

But they said they've just appointed a new head teacher and everything has changed. They've turned it around. I mean, have you heard things like that before?

[4 : 45] Yeah? Yeah? The person at the top, who they are like, it massively filters down to the rest of the organization. Right? As they set the pace, as they implement the standards, as their character impacts everything else, as they create the culture, that influence massively impacts everyone else.

So it really matters who we understand is in the hot seat. Who's right at the heart of Christianity. Really matters who is right there.

Who God is and understanding him rightly affects everything else. Let me just say a little apologetic angle here. It's why the triune God of the Bible and Allah of Islam, we love our Muslim friends, very different cultures.

And it all starts from who you understand God to be. I read a cracking book on that recently by a guy called Andy Bannister, who is a Christian guy. He did his PhD in Islamic studies. If you want to check it out, come and speak to me afterwards.

It's just in my room. Massively matters who you understand God to be. It affects how you understand yourself. It affects how you understand others. And most importantly, I think, it helps you understand the shape and the goal of the Christian life when you understand who this God is.

[6 : 06] And it's almost as if in John chapter 5, we're invited in to come and see the person who's in the chair in the school head office of the Christian faith.

That's the invitation that's made to us this morning in this text. Now, last week in John chapter 5, we saw Jesus in heated discussion with the religious leaders.

If you just scan your eyes over the first bit of the first 18 verses of chapter 5, you'll get a little bit of context. Because what Jesus is saying here, it's not just a blog post.

It's not just his thoughts. Actually, it's in conversation with creatures. The religious leaders are livid that he's had the audacity not just to heal a man on the Sabbath.

Remember, there's Saturday, this holy day. But he's also had the audacity to tell this man to pick up his mat and walk on the day of no work. And because he's done that, verse 18, and here's the clincher, he's made himself equal with God.

[7 : 15] So this isn't a case of crossed wires. This is not a case of misinterpretation. Jesus is unapologetic in his claim as he steps into the world.

And the guy's got some explaining to do. Okay? This all happens in the context of Jesus on the defense. As he explains himself, who he is.

And the Sabbath, the healing, is almost the, is it the dig to the spike? You get that analogy? He's teeing himself up to help the world understand who he is.

That's the context. And I find how Jesus answers that question fascinating. He doesn't firstly appeal, and see this, to might.

Because he could have done, couldn't he? He could have called down thousands of angels and flexed his divine muscles and said, see? Nor does he primarily appeal to right.

[8 : 18] Okay? We live in a world of rights. That's how we would have gone about defending ourselves. But do you see how Jesus does this? He helps people see his true identity.

And he unveils it in the context of explaining a relationship. Now that tells you something hugely significant about who the God of the Bible is.

And it tells you something wonderfully profound about what it is to know him. Now Jesus has used that little title, Father, before in this gospel.

He's used it in a count, I think, three or four times. But he's used it as a title, never with an explanation. But here for the first time in John's gospel, we're invited almost as it were to take a glimpse of the glorious relationship that exists between the Father and the Son.

And all I want to do here in the time that we have left is just pick out four words that Jesus uses to help us get our heads around how that relationship works.

[9 : 30] And know that as we take these in together, we are rowing out into some unfathomably deep, mysterious yet breathtaking waters.

I'll tell you my mindset as I started this week. It was a bit like when I went with my daughter to Grace Mount Swimming Pool a few weeks back.

You know what she loved to do? Favorite game. She's got four sinkies. You up with a sinkie? Do you know what that is? Yeah? And the game was I would throw them in, they would sink to the bottom, and she would go down and she would come back up and she would hold it aloft like the World Cup trophy.

Got my sinkie. Okay? Goggles on, deep breath, up she came. That's how I kind of came at this passage this week. But by the end of the week, I realized that we are friends, we are paddling in the mid-Pacific.

Okay? 11,022 meters down, that bad boy is at its deepest. And you're not going to get a sinkie when it falls in there. It's often said that the gospel is shallow enough for a babe to come and drink from without fear of drowning.

[10 : 43] But it's also true it's deep enough to swim in without ever touching the bottom. And this is the God of the Christian faith. You ready for a deep dive?

You're getting a deep dive. Here's the first word. You just get it straight in the text, verse 19. It's the word seeing. See, at verse 19, Jesus says, truly, truly, which is his way of saying, mark my words.

Underscore this. Understand. Jesus says, I only do and act according to what I see the Father doing.

So there is no disconnect between God the Father and God the Son. And I tell you what, this was a real game changer for me in my Christian life.

Because I remember hearing when I was younger that the Old Testament kind of contained this big, bad, scary God. Whereas the New Testament presented you with Jesus. And let's be honest, he's a much friendlier version of divinity.

[11 : 47] Okay, it left me thinking that God was somehow like that crazy uncle that you'd see at Christmas time, who loves a rant and is prone to an odd, non-PC comment.

And Jesus comes along as the trendier uncle, almost apologetically covering for him. And if that's your understanding of how the Old Testament and New Testament comes together, if that's your understanding of how the Father and the Son work like it was mine, then can I just say we are in for a wonderful surprise.

Because there is an exact continuity between the character of both. And it's more than Jesus is just like the apple hasn't fallen far from the fatherly tree.

It's more like than he's just like, oh, he's so like his dad. The Father is exactly like Jesus. The New Testament makes a big thing of that. He is the exact imprint.

He is the perfect stamp of God the Father. Which means that if you're here today and you want to understand who God is, what is he like? The transcendent God.

[13 : 02] What is he like? He is like the God up close in the person of Jesus. So that means when we see the heart and work of God the Son, we're seeing the heart and the work of God the Father.

And that's what these religious leaders need to see. Perhaps they're coming at this with a cold, shallow, moralistic and legalistic view of who the Lord is.

And Jesus is upsetting everything. But there is a wonderful continuity. Jesus says, I've seen the Father. But lest we think Jesus is just a delivery boy for God, here's the second word, verse 20, and it's the word loving.

So it's not just that the Father approves of the Son. It's not just that the Son is on friendly terms with the Father. The Father loves the Son.

Do you see that in the text? Just getting a little glimpse of this relationship here. The Father loves the Son. And so the question, what was God doing before he created the world?

[14 : 18] Told you we're going deep here, right? Before anything was, what was this God doing? The answer is that the Father was delighting in the Son in the joy of the Holy Spirit.

And that delight was absolutely reciprocated. Love is not something that God does. Love is something that he is.

And that's why we can say that God is love. Because what was he doing before the world was created? He was a community of love. A wonderful union of three persons, of Father, of Son, and of Holy Spirit.

Our good God is not one. He is one in three. He is triune. And that's what the works that Jesus is doing are telling us.

Every single healing and miracle is declaring to us that the Father loves the Son. He's not just a big fan, right?

[15 : 28] He's not just a groupie. The Father loves the Son. And here's a thought for you. And maybe for some of us here in our Christian lives, our friends, our hearts get so distracted by so many silly things.

Here's a thought that maybe has drifted from some of our minds. What is it to be a Christian? It's to be somebody who simply by God's grace that he has transformed our hearts, not because we're good, but simply because he is good.

And that we have come to feel the same way about Jesus the Son as the Father does. Yeah? We were the first time going up in church and hearing an older man talking about how he loved Jesus.

What? I can sit here as somebody who's almost 38 and say, I love Jesus. Come to feel the same way about God the Son to honor him as God the Father does.

Is that another thought for you this morning? That's what it is to be a Christian, isn't it? Love the Son. And here's the reason why that's even possible because of this third word and it's the word giving.

[16 : 48] Yeah? Loving, seeing, loving, giving. Now I remember sitting in St. James' Park down in London one hot summer's day with a good friend of mine.

And he turns to me and he says, deadpan, he says, do you know what? If I didn't worship Jesus, I think I'd worship this. Do you know what the this was?

It's his son. Right? I didn't worship Jesus, I think I'd worship the sun. Deadpan. And the thing is, I kind of got what he was meeting.

You ever thought about where the sun is? Right? This thing that's fascinated human beings ever since time began, this enormous, big ball of fire that sits in the sky, this giant centerpiece of our solar system that pulls everything into its orbit, the first source of every living thing.

I kind of get why people down the years have worshipped the sun. Right? But here's a little thought for you and it's Andrew Wilson, I'm indebted to this guy for helping me understand this over the last month.

[18 : 04] And this is a wonderful book if you're looking for something just a little bit different for devotions or to read before bed. Okay? He just takes the things of the world and nature and helps us see God's character through them.

Okay? He says this, other than human beings, it's hard to think of anything in creation that highlights as many of God's characteristics as the sun. Right?

Stick with me. Think about it. Why can the sun give light and heat? Because it is light and heat.

It doesn't need anything to sustain it. It gives but never depletes. Its action reflects its identity. Have you ever thought about the fact that so much of what God created was created to give us insights into who he is?

Why can God give life because he is life? Do you see it? And by life there, Jesus is speaking about physical life.

[19 : 10] Okay? The kind that Lazarus is going to experience later in chapter 11. The kind of life that only our creator can give us. Right?

I was listening to Nicky Campbell in Five Live on Thursday morning. If you listen to Nicky Campbell, he was asking his listeners to phone in to discuss the recent studies that were showing that people are dying younger.

Did you see that this week in the news? People dying younger? He said, what do you think? And it's a wonderful question to ask and we're interested in the answers to that and I know many of you are medically not just minded but you work in the field and it's a wonderful question to ask and we care about it because we love people.

Okay? But I'm sitting listening to Nicky Campbell in the car asking this question but I'm thinking there's a deeper question. Not just why do people die young but why do people die at all?

Okay? You see, you start seeing the world through a biblical lens. Welcome to a world where every death is unnatural. This is not the way God designed it to be because sin has entered the human condition and ruined God's good creation.

[20 : 25] We are now like flowers who die and I don't want to spoil your mother's day but who die the minute that we were cut off from the life source of the stem and are slowly wilting and dying.

There is physical death in our world because there was first spiritual death. In other words, we rejected our creator and our sin has led to death in the world.

There is physical death, there is spiritual death and to nick a line from a song we often sing with the kids, when it comes to spiritual life and us giving ourselves it, friends, a rock has a better chance of swimming and a potato has a better chance of dancing than we do of making ourselves spiritually alive.

It's why when you speak to your non-Christian friends and family and we love our non-Christian friends and family it's primarily a spiritual reason why so often they just don't get you.

It's why as we deny ourselves and as we take up our cross and follow Jesus the world thinks that we are weird as it contemplates a God-shaped world view with views and decisions that come out of that it's why they think they are so outdated and borderline offensive.

[21 : 54] It's primarily a spiritual reason why they look at Christians and think that they are actually the ones who have moved from life to death and I know some of you are feeling that right now the pressure that's coming from a world to say that you need to conform you need to move from death to life whereas Jesus says and we always need to allow him to form our world to form our view he says that for all those who hear and respond to his voice it's the other way around and it's why we should never underestimate the fact that you and I are Christians and if that's you here today however unspectacularly you think your life is however weak you think your faith is be encouraged that you might not have a story that Netflix will phone you up and make a documentary about you might have the most boring story in the world but make no mistake if your faith is in Christ that you have passed because of his grace from death to life and that life is a gift from Jesus it's like a balloon that you blow up for your birthday party right you ever done that recently little girl's birthday beginning of March blowing up these balloons right just picture it right just blowing up a balloon and that's what the Bible's talking about it when it says

God has given us spiritual life balloon's dead right balloon is dead and along comes Jesus and blows the breath of life into us and we become spiritually alive just like the balloon because he is the Lord of life and light that's who he is now why can he do this because Jesus didn't just enter our world of death and darkness he became the penalty that we deserve for our rejection of God as he hung on the cross why can he raise the dead why can he give life because he bore our penalty on the cross for our sin in our place and he rose and the resurrection life that he enjoys he imparts it to his people so if you're here today and the fact that you're a Christian doesn't get your heart singing doesn't make you think it's a big deal this text would tell you to think again that you have passed from death to life not because of the strength of your faith not because of your affections for him not because of our hearts are so often weary we have passed from death to life because God the son breathed spiritual life into us and we moved over all the praise goes to him and do you see how in the text it tells us that God the son didn't just feel indifferent about that and it pleases him to give life it's his good pleasure to give eternal life to his people he's the giving

God and lastly just really quickly fourthly he's the judging God because the father has given do you see verse 27 all judgment all authority to the son Jesus calls himself here the son of man what he's doing there is he's just taking a divine title that the Jews would have understood from Daniel chapter 7 where Daniel's talking about the son of man who's going to come Daniel's speaking there about the divine warrior king who God would appoint and who would come to bring in victory and rule for his people and caught up in this idea of the son of man is this idea of God in him defeating decisively evil and Jesus is saying to this generation he's saying to our generation God the father has given me that role he's given me that role this God is blindingly holy this God cannot tolerate evil friends do not mistake his patience with his approval though this

God will one day in the person of Jesus come back and he will make all things new the father and the son are committed to each other's honour and so the question is friends will we honour the son will we honour Jesus and on that day the son will rouse every human being who's ever existed and all will be judged on how they've responded to him seeing loving giving judging so friends tell me about this God you don't believe in here he is this morning is this him is this the God you've got in your mind what do we do with this well really the response we need to make comes in the word that appears four times from verse 25 and it's the word hear right will you hear him will you find life in his words and his work you know just as we close and leave you with this thought when we think about application

I had coffee with a good friend of mine the other week and I look at his phone and I noticed that his phone is in black and white what he's done is he's I don't even know you can do this on phones he's turned the tint of his phone right down some of you might do that I don't know I said why are you doing that and he just said that because when it's full colour it just demands my attention all the time all the time texts are going notifications are going and he just says I keep looking at it all the time right you know it's true with your phones don't you it's always demanding your attention remember when I used to work in law we used to have blackberries right remember those days good days just remember the red flash on the eye right the guys the people I worked with used to call it the red eye of Mordor right it was just calling you in come and answer me it's why they call them isn't it they joke about blackberries being crackberries wasn't it because we get addicted to our phones they're shouting for our attention all the time

[29 : 04] I think that's why there is something in the fact that our generation is information heavy but wisdom light because our phones and here's the point are forming us they're forming us all the time and it's scary isn't it when you get that notification on your phone that says how long you've been on it last week and the question is we are we are in a world that is fighting to form us and we've got to take that seriously haven't we the things that are going in the things that are shaping us the big biblical principle is that we become what we behold as we think about where we spend our hours the things that our eyes take in the things that our minds comprehend we are becoming what we behold and the invitation of this passage is to make that thing the one who gives life are we gazing at Christ are we delighting are we feeding our souls in him are we allowing the words of the good shepherd to draw alongside us and quench our souls are we gazing at him and the life that he offers and becoming more like him see this is the promise he makes and we end with this very truly I tell you whoever hears my words and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but is crossed over from death to life let's pray that's a wonderful and gracious father thank you for your word thank you that you are a

God who has revealed yourself lord we would be have no idea we would be in the dark if you hadn't done that father thank you that you've revealed yourself in creation father thank you that you've revealed yourself in your words and thank you for that special revelation that comes as we look at Jesus in action and so father I pray for us here this morning lord that our understanding our view of who you are it would be shaped and you would shape it and hone it so that true truth is the thing that guides our understanding about who you are father pray for those of us here this morning who have drifted maybe in their affections whose hearts are weary that lord that you the God who delights to give life father that by your spirit you would draw alongside us this morning and father build us up and strengthen us as your people father for those maybe that here this morning who don't know you father may today be the day where they come to trust in Jesus the son father we thank you for our time this morning and we pray all of these things in

Jesus is worthy and precious name amen