

God and humanity: The Big Picture

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[0 : 00] We're going through a series at the moment which is about fundamentals of the gospel and putting together some pieces of a jigsaw to do with that.

What I want to talk about this morning is not exactly what is on your sheet for the August diary, but it's to try to make sense of the things that we're learning and to try to put together something which we'll call the big picture.

The big picture. So far we've looked at these particular themes that God is creator. He is the one who has made all things and he keeps all things by his power.

That God is Trinity. One God. Three persons. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each God. Yet the God is one. What a mystery.

And yet how as we read the Bible we see what a glorious aspect of God this is. God is the ruler. He is in control. We reminded ourselves of that in prayer.

[1 : 06] He is in control of all things. He always has been and he always will be. History is in his hands. Man is amazingly made in the image of God.

And that sets man apart from the rest of creation. That we're made in God's image. And we looked at something of what that might mean. Especially that we have been made in a way which is suitable for God.

Relationship with God. But man is desperately fallen in sin. That we have fallen short and we continue to fall short every day of our lives.

From the first sin that was committed by Adam all throughout human history. That we are desperately and deeply infected by the problem of sin.

And sin in God's eyes requires judgment. That's the big picture. My task today is to put these thoughts together.

[2 : 06] Because they belong together. The Bible is shot through with a constant theme of a grand and unfolding purpose. Which connects God, his creation and in particular man.

There is a big picture. And even better. God has been pleased to reveal enough of it in the Bible. To take us through the whole of our lives. I want to point you in the direction of this particular verse. Buried in the book of Deuteronomy. Chapter 29, verse 29. And I would encourage you to memorize this verse. Because it is extremely helpful for us.

As we live our lives. The secret things belong to the Lord our God. There are secret things. There are mysterious things. There are things that God has not told us about.

But the things revealed belong to us and our children forever. That we may follow all the words of this law. You might look at that chapter again.

[3 : 15] It's at the very end of the chapter. It doesn't sit in isolation. The God who has brought his people out of Egypt. Out of their slavery. Is bringing them into the promised land.

Says to them. There are going to be some very difficult days ahead. When sin will be committed. When judgment will fall. And it will be a very dark time for you as a people.

And it's in that very dark and bewildering time. Where it may even appear as if God has abandoned you. That you need to know this truth. The things that are revealed belong to us.

They've been given to us. And our children. Forever. That we may follow all the words of this law. Difficult times are coming.

But hear what God is saying. And you'll be able to keep going steadily and well. And that may just be exactly what you need to hear today. Because it isn't just bleak times for a nation.

[4 : 26] But you may be in a very bleak and dark place yourself. What has God to say to you? He said enough. In his word. So that you may keep going.

And keep going well. We need to understand the big picture. Because it provides a bedrock for living our own lives.

Our own choices and decisions. Our reactions to events. Our relationship with people. And our attitude to life and death. We need to see and understand the big picture.

Because we can't understand enough. Or properly. Just by looking at our own lives. That's how many people choose to live.

Looking at themselves. And their feeling. And their needs. Or maybe comparing themselves. With others. But that's never going to give enough good answers.

[5 : 27] To live by. It's like trying to understand and appreciate a field. By just examining a blade of grass.

Or trying to appreciate a forest. By looking at a leaf. To miss out on the big picture. Is to miss out on the main reason. Why we're here.

In the world. And to miss out on the big picture. Is to make us very disorientated. And overwhelmed. By the many sad and troubling things.

That happen to us. And around us. The past few weeks of international news. Have been bleak and discouraging. You yourself may be going through.

A very unsettling time. With fear. And anxiety. We all need. To appreciate. This big picture. To have God's.

[6 : 24] View of the world. Well we've already got some building blocks. Or changing the metaphor. Some pieces of the jigsaw. Called the big picture. And I want to add.

Some more to that. This morning. Just briefly. To say the following. What more can we say? What more has God said about himself? That we need to take to heart. That God is holy.

And holy. Means something to do with perfection. And something to do with moral purity. This is the God we deal with. He's not a dirty God.

He's not a compromised God. He's not a God like people are. He is a perfect God. God. Two verses on your screen there.

Your eyes are too pure to look on evil. You cannot tolerate wrong. Apostle John writes. God is light. In him there is no darkness at all.

[7 : 28] So we come into this place today. There's darkness in us. Isn't there? But not in God. We add.

God is righteous. His holiness is not just an abstract quality. That sets himself apart from people. But it's a quality that causes him to react.

In the face of what is wrong. He acts in judgment. So the psalmist writes. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne.

Terrible and tragic it is that we see so many sort of pious words spoken by the governments of this world. Of this time. Not backed up. No actions that can be taken.

But God is a God of action. And he will act. Because he's a righteous God. And he is, if I might put it this way, obliged to act. When sin is revealed in his sight.

[8 : 36] Now God is love. Now everybody knows God is love. But actually that's not such an obvious and easy thing. That God should be love.

But the God of the Bible is a God who is love. And he shows it. So John, the apostle of love, writes very simply and straightforwardly.

God is love. What a wealth of meaning is encapsulated in that four letter word. God is unchangeable.

Many verses that could be given in support of that. I, the Lord, do not change. That's one of the biggest things we're aware of.

Everything around us is in change. We're in change. But God does not change. An awesome thought that is. That he's not just a God of the first century.

[9 : 39] The God of this century. And he doesn't have to adapt to changing fads and ideas. He doesn't have to be culturally relevant.

He is the same. So I've added a few more pieces of jigsaw to that puzzle we have before us there. And we could add a lot more. And this is why the whole of the Bible is important study for the person who is serious about wanting to have an idea of the big picture.

Of God and his world. Now I would say that this is revelation. Shown to us by God in the Bible.

These things we would not understand properly. Unless a Bible was given to us. And we could open its pages and read what God has said.

[10 : 42] That's not what we believe the Bible to be. It is the word of God. Not just the thoughts of man about God. But God speaking to us.

And revealing himself to us. But it's also something of recognition. There are things that we see but vaguely.

In a sort of a fog. And we need the Bible to make those vague and foggy things clear to us.

I was standing in the opticians this last week. Having my glasses adjusted. And they took my glasses away. And it's very seldom that I actually go through any part of my day without my glasses on.

And as I looked around. Unfamiliar surroundings. I could just about make out the words. But only because I'd been there before and had seen the words.

[11 : 46] But it was a bit disorientating. And I went through those little panic moments of thinking. If they break my glasses now. How am I going to get home? How am I going to get home? Living in this world without God's revelation.

Is a bit like living in this world without glasses. It's a bit of a fuzz. But you have the questions. I'd like to read to you a story.

From a few decades ago. In Cambodia. Each year. Young Rin would carefully push the yellow corn seeds in straight rows into the prepared soil of her father's garden.

When harvest time came. She would go out. To cut the ripe cobs off the tall corn stalks. Carry them home in her arms. To be roasted over the charcoal fire behind the house.

Curiously. She would run her little fingers over the rows of smooth waxy kernels. Pressing them to her cheek. As she wandered back up the path.

[12 : 51] She would often ask herself. Who made this corn? And the very first seeds from which it grew. Sometimes as she gazed out across the vast expanse of fields.

Of gently waving and ripening rice. Hanging heavy in the ear. A familiar question would taunt her mind. What causes the rice to grow and ripen with the regular pattern of the passing seasons?

Little Rin. Troubled by these questions. Began to inquire of those about her. Where did the sky and the earth come from? Who designed all the many kinds of trees and plants in the forest?

And formed the blue line of distant mountains beyond? Who thought it all up? And arranged it thus and so? And what are the different varieties of animals?

Living creatures under, on and above the earth? Where did they first come from? That was many, many years later.

[13 : 51] After she'd asked all those questions. And failed to get any satisfactory answers. A Christian team from a nearby village, out on dry season evangelism, visited her village from God's word, written in a book in the Cambodian language.

They had shown her the answers to her questions. Questions which had lain dormant and unresolved in her heart. Since as a little girl, she'd carried in the fresh cobs of corn from her father's garden.

She came to see this is God's world. God the creator. God the ruler. God the provider. And one step led to another.

And I read that story simply to encourage you with that thought. That in this big wide world, these questions have been planted in the hearts of men and women. Because they are made in the image of God.

And there's a bit of a cry that goes on in our hearts. Why is, why is this world where it is? What are we here for? What is the purpose?

[15 : 00] We're not satisfied by the answers that the world gives. But the book of Revelation. The Bible. God gives us the answers that we need to know.

It's a beautiful thing when someone receives God's revelation and is able to say, Now I see. Now I see.

Lovely if today someone here would be able to say, Well, it was all a bit dark and mysterious and confusing.

I'm just beginning to see. That's exactly what God does by his spirit as you read the Bible. Because he wants you to see. He wants you to know.

He wants you to be clear. As our verse in Timothy reminds us. This is good. It pleases God our saviour. Who wants all men to be saved.

[16:04] And to come to a knowledge of the truth. But it's not enough to see just a part of this picture.

We need to appreciate the whole. I do enjoy puzzles. And I'm pretty persevering. If I start a puzzle, I try to finish it.

But there have been puzzles which I've just given up on. And that's pretty disappointing. But it's only a puzzle. It's only a puzzle. Get over it. But in this case, to get only a part of the picture and stop there is not just disappointing, but it's actually dangerous.

So I want to warn you now about the danger of having a half view. Because actually the world is full of half views.

There is plenty of worldview out there which has an idea of God, but actually no relationship of that with man.

[17:12] So I suggest New Age, Transcendentalism, Buddhism, Ascetism, meaning the denial of body, as if that was an evil thing and the world was an evil place.

And what we needed basically was to rise out above this worldly mess and chaos and just be lost in God.

Now you would think that would be very admirable. But I say it's very dangerous. Because it's only half a picture. And it's not the picture of the Bible. And then there is plenty of worldview which has man without God.

Humanism, in all its forms and shapes, science, technology, sport, the arts, education, somewhere or another, people hang their hat on these points.

Their lives revolve around those thoughts. And the idea of the progress of man, of the growth of civilization, of things getting better and better, as if this is all that this world is about, is that we should be able to pursue our own agendas.

[18:30] Well of course there's a great truth in that. There's a great truth in that. And we're made in God's image. And so man has an immense capacity for doing good things, for progress, for development.

Man has an immense capacity because he's made in God's image. But he's made in God's image so that he might have a relationship with God.

And then there is man with a God to suit. A controllable God. And now listen to little Rin as well on this particular matter.

She comes from a sort of animistic and Buddhist background. Rin's fertile little mind was unusually fascinated by the various religious objects and idols about the house, the gods and various spirits which inhabited the fields, trees and streams, the eerie talk about the ghosts of dead villagers, and the numerous relics and religious pictures to be seen everywhere.

Sometimes her old grandfather would carve a tiny image of the Buddha from a molar or bone of a deceased relative. When no one was around, Rin would climb up to the God shelf in her parents' home, reach out a trembling hand and touch one of the figures to see if anything would happen to her.

[20:09] Once in secret, she actually lifted one of the gods down and examined it nervously, wondering to herself, can this little God see me and hear me? And does he know my name?

Can he really help me and answer my questions? Then holding the little statue up before her searching eyes and looking boldly into its tiny carved face, she whispered, Who made the earth? And the sky above? And all the creatures, the trees in the forest and the mountains beyond? Listening intently, she heard only the familiar rustling of the wind in the thatch and the crickets chirping under the floor.

No voice, no fresh insight, nothing entered her mind. The plump and unresponsive figurine only trembled silently with the movement of her nervous little hands.

Gods that cannot speak, gods that cannot act, gods that are no better than the people that they have been made by. And you think, that's a charming little story from another place in another time and another tradition.

[21:26] We don't have a God shelf in our home. Perhaps you do. Perhaps you do. Where are you asking your questions?

Who are you hoping to get answers from? Where are you putting your trust? Are they really helping you? Gods to suit.

Gods that are made in our image. Gods that are controllable. That's a distorted worldview. Millions of people live and die with that worldview, which is tragic.

I want to say that a Bible worldview has a very close connection between God and his creation. the God of the Bible is a God who is rich in himself and rich in all that he has to say about this wonderful world that he's made.

And if you want to have and know if you've got a Bible worldview, I ask you the question, what is your view of God? And what is your view of this world?

[22 : 42] And have you taken on board all those jigsaw pieces that we've already talked about? Two great facts about a Bible worldview. God is intimately involved in and concerned about all of his creation.

So we utterly reject, we utterly reject the worldview that only sees this place as dirty and something to be avoided and that we've just got to get ourselves lost in God.

That first half picture, that's not the Bible's worldview. Matthew 10 verse 29 says, Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?

Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your father. Isn't that an amazing verse?

Tiny sparrow lighting on the ground. Two of them. I bought two of them for a penny. But God is concerned about two, he's concerned about one sparrow, that tiny bird coming to the ground.

[23 : 55] It's all part of his purpose and control. He makes a special mention and demonstrates care and compassion on those that are marginalized, vulnerable, and ostracized, even when it's their own fault.

Come unto me, all you that are weary and heavy laden. He is there for the broken hearted. Psalm 147 verse 3. He's there for the refugees for the orphans and the widows.

Psalm 146 verse 9. He's there for the prisoners in physical, mental, or emotional prisons. And for the fools, he's there for them as well. He's there for sinners, Jesus said, I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

As well as everyone going about their daily business, read Psalm 107 and you see there about the sailors, the merchants, the city builders, and the farmers.

They're just going about their daily business and God is concerned for them. And we should add the lawyers, the checkout staff, the petrol station staff, the civil servants, the traffic wardens, the nurses, the social workers, the builders, the car mechanics, the students, the hairdressers, the mums and dads, athletes, pensioners, church workers, and office workers, soldiers and civilians, the unemployed, the sick, and the well, the insignificant, as well as the great, the very young and the very old.

[25 : 32] So does your view of the God of the Bible allow him such intimate relationship with everything and everyone? Well, as we read the Bible and imbibe its teaching on this matter, this dignifies the whole of life.

It puts significance to our everyday. God sees in his presence, he's ever minded to hear all who cry to him. All who cry to him.

I love those pastors of the Bible and just read Psalm 107 and you see that people are crying out to God in their distress and he hears their call and he responds to them.

God is intimately involved. Another great fact about Bible worldview is that God will hold everyone to account for the way they have lived.

Please turn Romans 2 verses 6 to 11. Romans 2 verses 6 to 11. All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.

[27 : 06] For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. Indeed when Gentiles who do not have the law do by nature things required by the law they are a law for themselves even though they do not have the law since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts their conscience is also bearing witness and their thoughts now accusing now even defending them this will take place in the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ as my gospel declares.

I read a later part of the passage there but it speaks there of God's judgment going back to verse nine there'll be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil first for the Jew and then

for the Gentile but glory honor and peace for everyone who does good first for the Jew then for the Gentile God does not show favoritism.

We've always lived in a sin ravaged world where sin in every life poisons and pollutes the Bible is clear and detailed in recording numerous instances of God's judgment on sinful behavior there is judgment now but there's also judgment to come God has appointed a day and God has appointed a person Jesus Christ who is the judge of all it was Jesus who awesomely and frighteningly says do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell Matthew 10 verse 28 does your view of the God of the Bible allow him such personal and final judgment in your life this fills the whole of life with awesome significance God knows and is judging applauding or condemning if you've been with me to this point you have become more and more aware of a massive problem in the big picture here is a loving God showering compassionate care upon his creation but here is a world of people showing content for this God by disobedient and sinful behaviour and we're all in that mix that's God's verdict upon us he says there is no one righteous no not one the sad ending is surely condemnation and eternal judgment which of us could stand on judgment day that day when God judges the thoughts and intents of the hearts of all is this why so many world views need to disconnect the real God who we know exists from the real world which we know is broken there is one remaining piece of the jigsaw that makes sense of the rest an amazing and a beautiful surprise we didn't think this up we didn't deserve this

God is under no obligation to do what he now says he does God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life God is so intimately caring for his creation that he has come to this earth in the person of his son taking human form feeling and frailty upon himself God is so requiring a perfection that Jesus the man lived an entire life as our representative the second Adam to satisfy all the requirements of God's holy law in every part and without a single blemish of sin God is so needing to execute judgment upon all sin that he has done so in the person of his son experiencing God's judgment upon himself in his death upon the cross

God is so pleased and satisfied by the life and death of his son that he has raised him from death into everlasting life ruling and reigning now forever and ever on the basis of what Jesus has done God is now restoring what was lost and broken so that there will one day be a new heaven and a new earth in which is righteousness and a fully restored creation God calls us each one to confess our sins to him and accept Jesus Christ as our substitute because of his perfect life and sacrificial death so that we may become part of God's restored creation what a brilliant astonishing and marvellous big picture this is how privileged we are to have been given eyes to see ears to hear and hearts to receive such things hallelujah what a God what a saviour

[33 : 10] Amen.