

The Enigma of Being Human

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- [0 : 0 0] Father, we ask that you would continue to show mercy upon us and pour out the Holy Spirit upon us, those gathered here in person, those gathering online, those who might watch this later.
- We ask, Father, that the Holy Spirit would fall with might and power and deep conviction, that we might not only hear your word well, that we would also do and live your word well.
- And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Amen. Please be seated. So I don't know if you, where everybody is with Jesus, who are here, and those watching online, where everyone is with Jesus.
- But one of the things which Christians don't really like talking about, and if you're not a Christian, you might not realize that this is the case, is that Christians often struggle with disappointment with God.
- We Christians often struggle with disappointment with God. And in fact, Christians often struggle with disappointment with God's word. We have a problem in our lives, and we go to read God's word, and it doesn't seem to do anything at all for us.
- [1 : 0 8] It doesn't seem to give us any insight. It doesn't seem to give us any particular peace. And so we become a bit cynical about God's word. Some of us will continue reading through our cynicism.
- Others will just quietly go from reading the word on a regular basis, being every day, to once a week, to once a month, to once every six months, to we can't remember the last time we read God's word.
- And now that George is saying this up front, we feel a tiny bit guilty. But the fact of the matter is, is that Christians struggle often, without being able to share it with anybody, with disappointment about God's word.
- It doesn't seem to speak to them at all. In fact, it's a very common problem that Christians in small groups would rather not study the Bible, but they'd rather study something that's more interesting and more helpful.
- We'd rather study something by C.S. Lewis or, you know, Kyle Strobel or something like that, because that just seems to be far more helpful than reading God's word.
- [2 : 0 6] This is going to really come to the fore for us a bit with this passage that we're looking at today, because the passage is talking about, on one level, a very, very, very contemporary problem, which is the control of the tongue, control of your speech, and the problems that go along with it.
- I mean, we live in an age... I think last week I said a couple of things off the cuff, and I think I shared with you that's how Amy Van Hemmen, when she was her admin person in staff meetings, about every second staff meeting, she'd say in the middle of the staff meeting after I'd said something that, George, is why we're not allowing you to have a Twitter account.

But we live in an age where people are hypercritical about speech in social media. So to hear that the Bible is going to talk about the tongue, the text that Shane just read, in fact, now you're maybe going back and saying, wow, he read that and nothing jumped out at me as being particularly helpful.

And if that's the case, aha! We start to have a little bit of a window into the problem that we Christians have with God's word, and the disappointment we have with it, and the disappointment we have with God.

So let's walk towards that issue. Let's look at the text again, and also at the same time, look a little bit at our disappointment with God. So it's James chapter 3, verses 1 to 12.

[3 : 22] Those of you who are watching online, we preach through books of the Bible, and that means that sometimes we have to talk about things which aren't very popular culturally, that are very counterculture in terms of today.

In fact, I'm going to have to make a very profoundly countercultural reference in the process of doing this sermon. But just sort of try to extend a little bit of grace to me as we do that.

But we read through books of the Bible. We don't hide anything. Everything in the Bible was written as a book, and so the best way to understand it is to read it like a book, to go from the beginning to the end. And today we're at James chapter 3, verses 1 to 12.

And it goes with this. Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Now, I'm just going to pause here for this. First of all, I take that very seriously. But one of the things I'd ask is that if you would have kindness towards me and pray that every time I have to open the Word of God to teach and preach, that I would take it very seriously, that I will be judged with greater strictness.

[4 : 33] And pray not just for me, but for those who lead small groups when they look at the Bible or talk about the Bible. When our Sunday school, I mean Messiah Kids Sunday school, just in general, when anybody is opening the Word, pray that this text will come to them and they will understand their responsibility under God as they teach, as we teach, as I teach.

And especially in me, because in our polity, I have, in a sense, like the top teacher role. That's partly in Anglican polity, how they understand who the rector is, is that I have the primary responsibility for handling the Word of God well.

So please pray for me and that I will be able to do that very well. Maybe by the end of the service, you'll say, boy, George, I need to pray for you more. And if that's the only thing you get out of a sermon, then I guess that's not a bad thing, that you'll pray for me more, that I can handle the Word of God better.

I'll just read that text again, and then we'll look at verse 2. Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, a perfect person, able also to bridle his whole body.

[5 : 55] And here body is being used as a sort of a metaphor for the whole person, including the physical. So it says something which is very, very true.

The word stumble here means sin. And so every single person sins at some time or another in terms of how they speak. In fact, actually, it makes the interesting observation, and this is sort of a key to what's going to go on with the rest of his little teaching about the use of our tongue or the use of speech, is that in fact, if you ever met a person who had perfect control of their speech all the time and used speech perfectly all the time, that could only be possible if the individual was perfect.

And so given that there are no perfect people, Jesus being an exception, that means we're all going to say things which are wrong. We're going to stumble in terms of how we speak.

And now it's interesting. James then doesn't go on to say, therefore, make sure that your preacher or your pastor is kind with himself.

Or therefore, don't be too hard on him if he makes a mistake. Or for me just to say to myself, well, you know, I said five or six really stupid things, two heretical things, but what the heck, everybody stumbles.

[7 : 16] So it could be that James introduces that. It would be a very Canadian way, actually, a certain type of branch of Canadian thinking for him to go from that. We're going to be judged with greater strictness, but let's be kind.

In fact, if you think about that, it's a very common refrain in our culture. You have to learn to be kind to yourself, be kinder to yourself, be kind to yourself. It's a very, it's in a sense, how we would understand the normal wisdom of the world about how it is to handle speech.

But James doesn't go in that direction. He takes it in a very, very different direction. But he doesn't take it actually in the direction that we want. We would like him after saying something like, be kind to yourself or be kind with the other person.

And we'd want him then to maybe say, and by the way, here are three simple points to control your speech. And so if, in fact, the Bible went from these two verses to say that, you know, verse three is be kind, and then verse four, five, and six are verses about how to have better control of your tongue, we would all probably say, well, no wonder we really want to study the Bible.

It's just, it's really practical, really helpful. It really touches me. It really makes me feel good. But in fact, the Bible doesn't do any of those things. It goes in a very different direction. And when we go to the very different direction, that we start to, if we're conscious of it, see our disappointment with God and with his word.

[8 : 35] So what happens next? Well, let's look at verse three. James goes on to say, if we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.

Look at the ships also, though they are so large and are driven by strong winds. They are guided by a very small rudder, wherever the will of the pilot directs.

Just sort of pause here before I keep reading. So he's just making a very sort of a simple, commonplace observation that in many cases, there are cases in the world that we just see naturally that a very, very, very tiny thing can control the big thing.

He's just sort of drawing that to our attention with how you work with really big horses and how you work with big ships. The very small thing can, in fact, be very powerful in controlling the big thing.

And then he continues on, and now his analogy starts to get a little bit more telling here, where in verse five he goes also, so also the tongue is a small member.

[9 : 42] And member here is saying, if you think about the body, the tongue is a pretty small part of the body. Yet it boasts of great things.

In other words, we use our speech as if it is like the bit in the horse. It is like the rudder in the ship. And the tongue, our speech, it readily accepts that type of role of control, of presenting the person, of being able to master situations, of being able to have just a greater power in situations.

We understand that, we grasp that. So he's going from, okay, you know, our speech, it's very common for us to boast of this, that our speech has this power in the world. And of course, obviously, the more powerful you are, the more powerful that you think your speech has, that the prime minister thinks his speech is going to have far greater control than maybe one of you.

But we all, even in our smaller roles, think that speech is going to have that type of power. So in a sense, we're setting ourselves up to think a little bit about what actually happens with our speech, which is what he does very next breath.

The second part of verse 5, how great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire. And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.

[11 : 10] The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, sitting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

Now, a lot of us have a problem with a text like this. It seems to be a little bit extreme. But if you think about it for a second, it's actually not very extreme at all. If we were doing this in a retreat context, praise God, the day will come when we can crowd into a living room or go off to a retreat location and we can sit without masks and see each other's faces.

But we go to some type of a retreat and I said, you're going to have three pieces of paper in front of you, you have a pen. You're going to have a little cardboard thing so nobody can see it. I want to assure you before we go into this exercise that nobody is to see what you're going to write.

I'm not going to ask to see it. You're not going to be asked to show anybody. And at the end of it, we're going to, there's a fire here and we're going to all throw the pieces of paper in the fire. So you can just be completely as honest as you possibly can.

And I said, so the first thing I'd like you to do is we're going to take five minutes. I'm going to set my timer and take five minutes and write down times in your life where somebody has said something to you that was very hard and cutting.

[12 : 28] Go. Now my guess is we'd fill that five minutes quite effortlessly. Like if I was to ask you that, every single one of us would be able to think of different times that people have said something to us that's been very hard and very, very cutting.

We wouldn't have problems. We wouldn't have to think, gosh, I got to go back. Like I'm really old. Gosh, I got to go back till I was like four or something like that. No, you know, there'd be all sorts of times. In fact, you'd almost want to do this with a retreat context that there's going to be some prayers for healing and forgiveness afterwards because it could be triggering some of the terrible things that your husband, your wife, you know, your ex-husband, your ex-wife, you know, your neighbor, your boss, your teacher have said to you that still have power into your life even today.

But then I said, we get over that. I said, now we're going to take five minutes and I'd just like you to write down things that you've said to other people that have really hurt them and you wish you could take them back.

Once again, I'd got \$100. None of us would have problems thinking it. In fact, the fact of the matter is is that if one of you had problems coming up with anything that you'd said wrong, what would all of the rest of us say?

You are so self-absorbed and narcissistic that you don't ever recognize having said anything hard? Like it wouldn't be, none of us, not a single one of us would take it as a sign of holiness that a person can't think of things that they've said that have hurt another person.

[13 : 53] None of us. And I'm not even just saying us because we're, you know, Christians here. If you went to a local Tim Hortons, you went to a local Starbucks, a bridgehead, you went to a bar, a restaurant, you took your people at workplace and you said, we're going to do this exercise and there was this one person who couldn't think of a single thing that they could say that they'd ever hurt another person and everybody would go, oh gosh, boy, that person must be really narcissistic and self-absorbed.

That's what we would all say. Why? Because we can all think of things that we've said. And that actually would even get worse. I said, okay, now we're in our third five-minute period and you have a third piece of paper. Okay, we've dealt with things that people have said to you, things that you have said to other people.

I want you to write down things that you've said in the car or in your mind but not to the other person. Write it down on a piece of paper.

Well, if you're at all self-aware and not self-absorbed and narcissistic, there'd be smoke in the room.

I mean, unless you guys and gals are all vastly more holy than I am, which is probably the case in most cases, but even if you're holy, you'd have all sorts of things that you say in your mind about people, your boss, your wife, your husband, your best friend, your kids.

[15 : 12] So, if that's in fact the case, why is it that we have such a hard time with verse six and verse five? Listen to it again where it says, the second half of verse five, how great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire.

How many of us have trouble in our marriages, in fact, have had friendships or relationships break, have lost promotions, have had deep trouble in our lives because of something that we've said?

How many of us have a hard time relating to maybe a father or a mother even today, even if it's just the memory of them because of something that they've said? Isn't that true? Verse six, and the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.

In other words, it reveals to us things about ourselves which are deeply wrong. It stains the whole body and sets on fire the course of our life and actually, when I hear set on fire by hell, I'm not going to talk about the reality of hell but Christians, Orthodox Christians believe that hell exists.

But the other thing which is just true about that, about all of this thing is this, that there is a profound mystery to evil, that there is something about evil which is irreducible, that if we once again we are not so self-absorbed that we can't be self-aware, that we are so addicted to narcissism, there are times in our life, I mean there's times in my life I might say, well you know, I said that bad thing to my wife, you know, but the fact is, you know, I was under a lot of stress, the fact of the matter is you'd said a couple of, you know, you said two or three things to me that, you know, sort of put me off, I'm tired, you know, I'm hangry, like, you know, I can come up with, but you know, the fact of the matter is there's some times where it just comes out.

[16 : 55] It just is there. You could tell a truth and the truth wouldn't even cost you anything, like the person might even be happy that you say the truth, but you say a lie.

You could just make a compliment, it would be easy, but instead you make an insult and it's just there, it just springs out. You can't blame it on your upbringing, you can't blame it on anything, you can't give any type, it's just there.

And so, all of a sudden we see that this which looks a little bit as if it's a bit extreme, is actually describing what we are like as human beings.

And in fact, actually, remember I said at the beginning that one of the things, the wisdom of the world is that what we have to do is to be kind with ourselves, but the fact of the matter is that we see that if we understand what really goes on in our lives, that that's actually often very terrible advice.

I mean, just imagine for a moment that if I had said something very, very, very cutting and bad, a couple of very, very cutting things to one of my daughters, and this still bothers them to this day, and then here I get up and I stand up on my hind legs and say, you know, sometimes I've said some things that are pretty hard, but I'm trying to be kind to myself.

[18 : 17] Well, the people who've been hurt by what I've said would say, no, no, no, time out. I don't want you to be kind to yourself. Like, own up to it.

Like, I'm glad you have anxiety and are sleepless. Like, good. If you hear somebody saying racist things which are very, very helpful, and then you hear them say, by the way, I'm learning to be kind with myself, say, no, don't be kind with yourself.

Like, what you need is repentance, like amendment of life, like taking responsibility for what you did. In some ways, what James is doing here before he continues, he's sitting a little bit of a puzzle and a riddle for us, a bit of a riddle about human experience.

And the riddle of the human experience is that we both expect of ourselves and others is that they should always control their speech. Yet at the same time, he's sitting before us that we cannot control our speech all the time.

And so, what's the third sentence there? I should control my speech all the time. I can't control my speech all the time. Therefore, maybe I should pretend that I'm holy and righteous and better than you.

[19 : 48] Maybe I should do, which is a lot of what goes on in our culture right now, which is, sorry, I almost said something. Thank you for whoever is praying for me right now.

I almost said something that, you know, anyway, but a lot of times what we do is we get on the attack to make it look like we've arrived, but to hide our own problems. We attack, we attack, we attack and try to make other people feel guilty.

Do we pretend that there's some, like, what do we do with that? And so, James is sitting before us a bit of a riddle, something to ponder. And then he goes on a little bit and he tries to make it a little bit deeper for us.

Verse 7, for every kind of beast and bird of reptile and sea creature and just pause, it's going to be, for those of you who know your Bible very well, it's obvious here that James is making an allusion to Genesis chapter, the sixth day of creation.

And he uses these four categories from the sixth day of creation and he's saying basically all of every animal, every creature, because he's taking the four categories that the book of Genesis and the sixth day of creation uses to talk about every type of creature, animal.

[21 : 08] And so, I'll read it again. For every kind of beast and bird of reptile and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by human beings. But no human being can tame the tongue.

It is a restless evil full of deadly poison. Now, once again, it sounds a bit extreme, but there is something restlessness.

There's a restlessness to our speech. That we, if we're at all self-aware, we know that there are times when we just say something, we exaggerate, we under things, we flatter when we know we're doing the wrong thing, we insult, we put down.

There's something unstoppable and unsettled about our speech, even amongst the most controlled. And how is it? Like, if you think about it for a second, now this is like James, James, Jim, yes, but probably what Jesus called him, Jimmy, but James, he's setting this riddle.

Like, why is it? Why is it that human beings can, in a sense, master or control every single type of animal in some way or another?

[22 : 26] I mean, whether it's through our, you know, not a particular individual, but human beings in general, doing something that makes an animal to go extinct or causes others to flourish or kills or poisons or whatever, but there's this general power that we have.

But why is it that we can do that? Like, why is it that you can, you know, you can have somebody who can tame a, you know, a snake charmer or an elephant trainer or a dog or whatever. We can actually do that to ourselves with what we say.

Like, why is that? How come that is? How come that is? But, by the way, what, what James is doing here, remember I said that this text reveals a little bit at first about our disappointment with God because what we want is we want something like be kind to yourselves, and then we want a couple of techniques about how to use our tongue better, but the fact of the matter is, is that what often happens with techniques is they don't, if you don't understand the way the world is, you can't provide wisdom.

There's a fellow who comes to the clock and for many years he had a very, very high level job in the government and he was an expert on federal, the relationship of the federal government to the provinces.

He had risen to the top of the Privy Council, a very high position in the Privy Council and he knew the history, he knew the laws and I'm sure that if one of you one day went and said, by the way, I figured out this wonderful thing with COVID and masks and this is my wisdom, they should do this and this and this and this and after one minute of you talking to him, he'd know that you have no idea about how provincial and interprovincial, you know, federal and interprovincial things work.

[24 : 06] Like you were as clueless as that door over there and the more you talk, the more he'd realize that you actually know nothing and so any advice you give is worse than useless because you're not talking about the real world.

There are some of you here who are engineers and within your sphere of engineering, if I said, oh, you know, there's this technological problem and I figure out a way to solve it and then within 10 seconds they realize you don't know the vaguest thing in the world about that engineering problem and every extra five seconds of conversation just cements the depth of your ignorance.

Your technique will not be of any use. You need often in self-help books which provide techniques. It does not emerge out of one who has thought about the nature of human beings.

not always obviously. There can be some good advice that comes but often it comes out of a lack of awareness, a lack of real pondering the riddle and the mystery and the enigma of human beings in speech.

And he's going to press into the mystery of what it means to be human and how we use speech in verses 9 and 10. Look at what he says. With it, this is our speech, we bless our Lord and Father and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

[25 : 32] From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things ought not to be so. If this week one of you who's in a small group and I encourage you to be in small groups, if one of you is in a small group said, you know, so I just need to get something off my chest.

No, so blessing God means that when you bless God you get to know who God is in terms of his attributes and his excellencies and his glory and you're able to express it and give thanks and gratitude and in a sense if you believe that God is the highest being you're talking about the very highest things and if you understand cursing partially as not necessarily casting a spell but as wishing, doing something so that the person withers, that they're diminished, that they are shamed, that if you understand that that is what cursing is, if one of you in a small group this week said, you know, I had this really great time of worship on Sunday, the scripture text, the singing, everything was just so good and yet, you know, I got home and I just did this to my wife.

I just said this or I said this to my kids or I went out for coffee or I saw my mom or I talked to my dad and I just did this.

You know what? None of us would be surprised. Like every single one of us would say, I've been there. I've been there. I've been there.

And at a deeper level, how is it that the German people could produce Bach and Auschwitz? How is it that the German people could produce Bach and Mozart and Auschwitz?

[27 : 25] And we know that this ought not to be. That in the world of is and is and is and is that there's an ought that's there, that it ought not to be.

And then he brings it to a bit of a close before he moves into other things in verses 11 and 12. And actually, what he does here now is he said because we all understand, look what he does, it's a very, very clever type of thing to try to communicate how human beings are both natural and unnatural, that we are both glorious and monstrous, that we are both good and evil.

And now he's done some of that things. He wants to bring home the fact that we are natural in the natural world and yet there's something profoundly unnatural about human beings. How does he put it in verses 11 and 12?

Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers or sisters, bear olives? Or a grapevine produce figs?

Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. So why is it that there's something about human beings? We all know we're natural and yet there's something profoundly unnatural about us.

[28 : 46] In fact, if you could put up the first point, what James is doing is saying, a human being is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

How can you be both natural and unnatural, good and evil, glorious and monstrous? A human being is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

That's a phrase from Winston Churchill used to describe Russia. How can you be both natural and unnatural, good and evil, glorious and monstrous?

Now, it's even harder for us in our day and age to try to get our minds around this problem. But, you see, we wanted a few words to easily calm our conscience in a couple of simple techniques.

techniques. But, James is saying, under the renewing power of the Holy Spirit and the Gospel, I'd like you to learn wisdom.

[29 : 55] Like, wisdom for the real world before you manage techniques for an unreal world. So, here I just ask a little bit of mercy for you.

I'm going to make a reference to one of the two reasons why we have a lot of trouble trying to think this through today. And, and, and, and, and it's this. I know that in a room like this, there's at least one person who's had an abortion or helped somebody to have an abortion.

And, amongst those who are watching this online, there's almost definitely some who are watching this that have either had an abortion, work in the abortion industry, enable, have enabled or argued for abortions.

So, I know that in my reference right here, I'm doing something which might evoke anger and pain within you. And, I actually thought and prayed along as to whether I was going to say this, but I realized I needed to say it because of the nature of the text and the nature of the riddle which the text has set before us.

So, I just want to assure you that I know that many times Christians talk as if the church gathered is a rally for the anointed and the righteous to wage war on an unholy and unrighteous world.

[31 : 17] And, there have been many churches that talk and act like that. And, I want to tell you that that is not the biblical understanding of the church and hopefully it will never be the understanding of church and the Messiah. The church is a hospital for sinners.

It is a hospital for the sinful and the broken. There's a place where beggars come to get free bread. And, that's what a church is.

And, so if there are any here or any who are watching who have had an abortion or have been part of having an abortion, I just want to assure you that Jesus loves you and that the way to move forward is always to come to him first for grace and mercy.

And, if you want to have conversations with us about that, you will be listened to without any judgment whatsoever, only with love. And, that even the hardest parts of God's word that confront things in our lives which are very hard is always so that he will connect with you and that you can know as love and mercy.

But, I mention that because what is at the heart, one of the things which is at the heart of abortion is it separates the human from the person. It separates the human from the person.

[32 : 37] And, when it separates the human from the person and then the person starts to increasingly become some type of a construct, it makes it hard for us to think of human beings and who human beings are.

It's one of the reasons why, flowing out of the deep hold of abortion in our country, that we have discussions as to whether robots can be persons, whether there will be a time that artificial intelligence can move to becoming a person, whether a whale or a dolphin or a chimpanzee can be a person because we've completely decoupled separated being human from being a person because then what happens in the womb is not of a person but just of some physical stuff.

And that makes it very hard for us to have any type of wisdom about thinking about this. The Bible makes it very clear that every human being, every human being is made in the likeness of God and has inherent worth and dignity.

Every human being, both those in the womb, the most severely handicapped, the most elderly, the most diseased, that we can go to India and go to the most lowest despised classes and castes and say you are a human being made in the likeness of God.

And because you are a human being made in the likeness of God, you have an integrity and a worth which is not bestowed by the powerful or by the state or by religion or by ideology and cannot be removed by them but is to be acknowledged by the powerful and is to be acknowledged by the state.

[34 : 32] Your dignity comes as a human being from being made in the likeness of God. And because you are a human being made in the likeness of God, it means that there is something which is unique about being human.

We have another problem which flows from the naturalistic understanding of evolution and if in fact the naturalistic understanding of evolution as it moves through society and it moves through the culture, it becomes harder and harder and harder to understand why there is anything specifically unique about human beings.

Why should we value a human being over a dog? Why should we value a human being over a tree? Why should we value a human being over a plant or a microbe? Well there is no reason other than our quest for power.

But the Bible says the fundamental insight of every human being that there is something unique about being a human being. That sense is based in reality.

Only the Bible makes clear that human beings are made in the likeness of God. And because human beings are made in the likeness of God that is why there is something in a sense both natural and unnatural about us.

[35 : 52] Why there is something glorious about us. But of all the created things only human beings are made in the image and likeness of the triune God.

only human beings. In fact if you could put up the next point the biblical gospel is the only key that fits the riddle wrapped in a mystery inside the enigma of the human condition.

The biblical gospel is the only key that fits the riddle wrapped in a mystery inside the enigma of the human condition of your human condition human beings.

The biblical narrative tells us we're made in the likeness of the triune God. Hence we were made to be social. We were made to be communal. We were made to be with other people to have our faces show and reflect who we are and to hear speech and conversation and to grow together.

God made us in his likeness so that we would have a special role in the created order of being fruitful and multiplying and caring for the world to be the gardeners and sub creators of his created order and we used our glory our splendor which was made to have a relationship with a triune God and to have a relationship with each other and we use that to turn from God and turn from each other in self exaltation and in so doing that we bent ourselves we broke ourselves we twisted ourselves the biblical word is we fell and God in his mercy and kindness did not erase us or erase his likeness in us and so that every human being is both made in the likeness of God and there is something about us that is glorious and that can bless God but at the same time there is something in every single aspect of what makes us us what makes me me and what makes you you that is twisted that has been touched by our desire to turn from

[37 : 56] God and turn from others and turn from the created order and to live an imaginary life where we are exalted and we are great and we are powerful and we can do what we want and we can declare who we are and we can declare the meaning of our lives and there is something in every human being that is monstrous it is why that on one level statistically speaking what you see in human beings is that we are completely natural but it is not natural in the sense of what God intended and because he never removed his likeness from us we have this deep sense that it is not in fact the way things are supposed to be that there is something unnatural about the naturalness of human beings and that God in his mercy seeing our problem does what only the biblical gospel can account for that God would show mercy in a way that can touch every human being who is made in the likeness of God because you see if every human being is made in the likeness of God that means that God himself

God the son of God the one in whose likeness we are made that he could both remaining the God himself could take into himself our nature as being in his likeness and that he then could live the life of unbroken communion and fellowship with God that we could not live and that he could die on a cross as a sacrifice satisfying the demands of justice and that he could rise from the dead burying in himself in his risen resurrection our human nature and that because every human being is made in the likeness of God if the God in whose likeness we are made does something it is something which is potentially available for every human being and only the biblical gospel can account for that and can offer real mercy the way that Jesus is introduced in the gospels is as

Emmanuel God with us in the midst of our mess and the mess of our life only without sin to redeem us he enters the mystery of what it means to be human that we might enter the mystery of grace and redemption at great cost to God and that we receive this by faith if you could put the last point up that would be very helpful so not only has the biblical gospel as the only key that fits the riddle wrapped in a mystery inside the enigma of the human condition the biblical gospel provides the means of grace for humbly pressing on remember the mystery is this we should control our speech we can't control our speech therefore well we should despair or we should become cynical or we should pretend but the biblical gospel holds us if we are in the security of mercy we are in the security of mercy we have the grace to humbly press on under the security of mercy no

Christian should ever start to say you know what I'm going to stop trying to care about my speech no the gospel holds us never surrender to cynicism or despair always press on towards controlling your speech ask the Lord for mercy that you might do it at the same time know that as you pursue it you will stumble but do not let that cause you despair but once again seek out the Lord's mercy and repent and be reconciled make amends secure in the mercy and the knowledge that God the Son of God knew all of that when he died for you and that your relationship with the eternal triune God is secure not because of what you've done but because of what he has done so that as the gospel grips you you realize that you can walk towards forgiveness you can walk towards repentance you can walk towards amendment of life you can walk towards reconciliation you will need to do all of that why because until you see Jesus face to face you will stumble but the means of grace are that you will stumble so call out to the

Lord for mercy and know that mercy allows you to say that was wrong that just came out of hell that is just wrong Lord have mercy help me not to do it again help me to renounce that at the same time help me to never press on and press on to press on to become more like God has intended you friends if you've never given your life to Jesus there is no time better than now only the Bible only the biblical gospel begins to make clear to you the riddle the enigma the mystery of your human condition in a way that respects and gives integrity to who you are only the gospel provides the way for you to be made right with God and the means of grace for you to press on and to know life please stand bow our heads in prayer father we thank you so much that when we gather together as your people on a Sunday morning we're in our small groups we're in our mentoring relationships that father we are not coming together as the perfect the anointed the exalted the ones who are above other human beings that father you want to have us enter in ever more deeply as we're gripped by the gospel ever more deeply into the mystery and the riddle and the enigma of the human situation and the human condition that we find ourselves in and we give you thanks and praise that your son entered into that in a way to save us and to redeem us that we can know by faith receive by faith and that he will walk with us and in us and we will walk with him and in him as we press on as we stand up after we have fallen and so father we thank you for that father make us disciples of Jesus who are more and more gripped by the gospel that we might learn to speak and to live for your great glory and for the good of our husbands and wives our friends our children our parents our bosses our co-workers those who work underneath us our neighbors our friends and the the passerby that we come to see father because so gripped by the gospel that we might forward move forward repenting as we need but pressing on and pressing on to speak words of blessing not cursing speak words of truth and not lie words of justice and goodness not injustice and evil words of mercy rather than vengeance words of forgiveness rather than hatred and all God's people said amen