Ah, my dear angry Lord

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[0:00] Well, after that, I don't know, I didn't really prepare an introduction. Therefore, the best way to start, I've decided it really is an introduction, is to lower your eyes to the piece of paper you've been given.

The poem is by George Herbert. And it reads, Ah, my dear angry Lord, since thou dost love yet strike, cast down yet help afford, sure, I will do the like. I will complain yet praise. I will bewail, approve.
And all my sour, sweet days, I will lament and love. George Herbert. Anything I say after this is a letdown.
So it's a commentary on the greatest works of art are sort of burnt up by the work of art. So I'd like to spend just, obviously, a bit of time today simply looking at this, I'll put my cards on the table, at this thing of beauty.
This eight-line poem by our man of the day, George Herbert. He was born in April, April 3rd, 1593.
[1:34] So there's a good reason to attend to this little piece of beauty. It is a reason or for reasons needed. A piece of beauty, and I'm going to argue as well, hardly too controversial.

A little piece of beauty and wisdom. I find beauty here and wisdom. 1593, as you see in front of you here, 1593 to 1633 are his dates.
Let's try to relate dates to other events that happened in history. 1517 is when Luther started the Reformation. 1590, so Herbert's a long ways from that.
The waves of events coming out of Germany and the Reformation are happening. A very short life, therefore, 40 years as a clergyman, a priest, and a poet.
Details of his life are easy to come by, so we won't do much really at all of biography today.
Everyone seems, by and large, it's an interesting fact about this man.
[2:43] Everyone, I'm going to qualify this in a bit, everyone seems to like this poet, which is an interesting fact about him. In the 18th century, the other day in reading some more about him, I was reminded that there was some cooling.

There was some loss of appreciation. A great man like Hobbes apparently didn't like the poetry of Herbert. But generally speaking, there is a real love of this man.
We'll talk about this a bit as we unfold this. I think that's a significant thing. There you go. George Herbert today, just through the focus of one poem, and see some broadening out of what this poet poem, this kind of work of art says to us in our time.
So there, George Herbert, let's begin with a word of prayer. Lord, we thank you for the gospel and all that the gospel has produced, its beauty, its wonder.
Help us to grow in the things of the gospel as we look at this work of art, very much produced in your praise and honor. We pray that what we do here today will be, again, the same to your glory and to our benefit.
[4:01] Amen. Sometimes we're encouraged to distinguish big words to use in the morning, exegesis and hermeneutics.

Exegesis establishes what a text says, so we're told by the learned ones, and hermeneutics speaks to what it means. I'm not sure if there's really too much of a distinction there that you can really hold on to for a long time.
Helpful or not? Helpful. That may be helpful. Maybe it isn't. Maybe it's better to speak of form. I will today. Form and content. That's more straightforward for me.
There's a form to any work of art, any text, and then there's its content. Maybe that's a little better. I don't know. This poem is, noting the obvious, and here you speak to form, this poem is a prayer.

Good to keep that in mind. The poem is a prayer. Speech to the Invisible God. Herbert produces this poem as speech to the God he believes in.
[5:12] Prayer, it goes without saying, was highly regarded in Herbert's world. Injun against the Almighty, Herbert calls it in one of his famous poems about prayer, called Prayer.

Injun against the Almighty. Prayer assaults heaven itself. Prayer assaults heaven. That's Shakespeare, or one of his characters tells us.
In Shakespeare, you find a description of prayer. Prayer assaults heaven. A powerful thing. Prayer. Prayer, seemingly a weak form, but it moves mountains.
So we have been told on the highest authority. Heaven uses weakness to accomplish great things. And this poem, one of its sub-themes is that fact. Weakness is used by God to create and do great things in the world.
[6:14] Form, obviously, to stay with the idea of form, might lead us to compare this poem with the chief prayer form in the Bible, as we all know, the Psalms, the Psalter.

Herbert led what you could call an ecclesial life. That's for sure. He lived life in the church. He was delighted to live a life in the church.
He lived a church life. His mind, we can safely say, lived in liturgical form. If you know something about Herbert's biography, you know that's an obvious fact about him.
And his poems, even in the form that he put a whole bunch of them in, repeat a kind of liturgical form. Life, this was a thought that was deeply attractive to George Herbert and to many people like him.
Life is to be a way of prayer. The Psalms present to us life as a way of prayer, I think we can safely say.
[7:18] So there's something about form. All of Herbert's, at his life's end, he gave lots, maybe all of his poetry to a friend.

It's reported that he did this on his deathbed and simply said, who knows, maybe someday some poor soul, that's his exact language, may find comfort in this poetry.
There it is. His hope, to put it mildly, has proven true. Prayer, certainly Herbert knew this, prayer strengthens.
Prayer comforts. Prayer humbles. Prayer teaches. All of these things are true in the Christian life. Certainly it saturated the thinking and mind of a George Herbert. Prayer is, in fact, nothing less than God's breath in man returning to his birth. Another one of Herbert's way of describing what prayer is.
[8:23] I thought when you pray, it's God's breath in you going to back to where it started. God prays through us, through his spirit.

God's breath in us, praise. A thought that Herbert lived by. A little bit more about form. A prayer poem is obviously a literary portrayal.
That's interesting. A prayer poem is a literary portrayal of an inner spiritual state. Again, stating the obvious.
It's sometimes fun, helpful to state the obvious. Prayer, a prayer poem, a literary portrayal of an inner spiritual state. That's what Herbert gives us here.
A spiritual state which attends, which, I'm sorry, a spiritual state which stands still, if you will, for our inspection, we can sort of slow down and look at this spiritual state in a literary form given to us by a poet of genius.
[9:35] A man named Athanasius. You've heard of Athanasius. He's way back there in the early church. A man like Herbert would have called Athanasius, oh, you mean our brother in Christ?

That would be, again, how a 17th century Christian would describe Athanasius. Would we so describe someone like Athanasius? Herbert would think we should.
Our brother in Christ, that's who Athanasius is. We think like Christians in the church. He's one of our teachers in the faith, as is a man like George Herbert. So he's our brother in Christ.
Athanasius says this about the Psalms. Athanasius says that the Psalms are, quote, a mirror where we may behold the affections of the soul.
A mirror where we may behold the affections of the soul. The affections of the soul. I like that little phrase. Picturing Religious Experience is the title of a very good book about Herbert's poetry, about his art and his whole stance in the world as a Christian.

[10:53] Picturing Religious Experience. I think his name is Dirksen. He's a Canadian scholar in the Maritimes. Very good book about Herbert. Herbert's poems are usually, not always, of course, he wrote a lot of poetry.

Herbert's poems are usually about the affections of the soul. But more than that, we can safely say, the affections of the soul which Herbert portrays are always, are almost always in the form of spiritual conflict and resolution of the conflict or a trajectory towards resolution.
Spiritual conflict leading to or on a trajectory towards resolution, which leads us back to our poem. And again, this appears, this idea of spiritual conflict and some kind of resolution or some sort of scene of a resolution on the horizon is here.
Again, this is obvious. It's on the surface of this poem. Right off the bat, of course, there's conflict implied or more than implied, isn't it? Ah, says the poet, Ah, my dear, angry Lord.
Dear, angry. Dear, angry. There's tension here. Dear, angry. And then he says, again, looking at the poem, there's love, but you strike.
[12:38] You cast down, but you help. There is the tension that the poet Herbert immediately sets before us. They're written here if you can see it there.

Dear, angry. Love, strike. Cast down. And then you give help. And then there's, again, this is so obvious, there's an approach to resolution.
We'll see how this works in a minute, but he juxtaposes now in the second four verses, second four lines, excuse me. Complain, praise. Bewail, approve.
Sour, sweet. Lament, love. These words clash, if you take them at face value.
What's this lament, love, that ends the poem? So Herbert's God is described, again, as dear and angry.
[13:42] This God that Herbert prays to loves and he strikes. He casts down and yet he puts forward help.

What kind of a God is this? This is a God of spiritual conflict, of struggle. Then the poet, knowing such a God, this poet knows this God in this way.
A God who places his creature in this place of tension. Herbert proposes to us the simple thought. Do you think of God as a God who places you in places of conflict and tension?
Herbert is telling us that's what you should expect God to do in your life. God is a God of spiritual conflict, of tension. Here is a place of conflict.
But then, very boldly, to keep moving right along to here, and again, it's so simple and obvious what Herbert does in his poem, but you still want to stop and just notice it.
[14:49] Is it very boldly that our poet now says in his prayer, you've given me spiritual conflict, you've given me, in a sense, contradiction.

Then the poet says to his God, well, I will do the like. I'm going to answer you in kind, God.
Prayer assaults heaven itself. Okay, God, I get it. I get the way you're, how you work. I will do, I will do the like.
Almost, again, here, this is a lovely thing about poetry. It slows you down sometimes if you want to do this with poetry. Almost a touch of the, is it defiance here?
I don't know. It's not necessarily defiance. Or maybe even the playful. Is Herbert being playful in his prayer?
[15:54] I'll do the like. If that's the game we're going to play, I'll do the same. Or maybe this is a voice, this is the voice. I think you find this sometimes in the Psalter.

Is this the voice of spiritual shrewdness? God is inviting you into his little moment with you.
Tension, spiritual conflict. And okay, God's wanting me to think this through. I'm going to be shrewd with God. This is God's breath in me going back to God.
I'll be shrewd with my God. Yes, I will. Maybe it's all of the above. I don't know. But this is a bold line. I will do the like.
You place me in this place of tension and conflict. Well, I'm going to do the same kind of thing, God. Back at you. The poem is therefore a kind of soul work.
[16:57] He's taking his God seriously. And he's doing some work with his life before God in prayer. It's a kind of soul work.

It portrays, obviously, the poem, godly introspection. Have you noticed that in your prayer life, it goes along with a bit of self-knowledge?

I'm praying this now because I'm in a certain situation. I'm looking at myself in the presence of God. The soul does many things in the presence of God. Reverence your circumstances, says a well-known Puritan.
He should be much better well-known, better known. Puritan John Flavel, F-A-L-V-E-L. Reverence your circumstances, says this godly Puritan.
Reverence your circumstances. They are God speaking to you, says the Puritan teacher. Intellectual hero of someone named Marilyn Robbins.
[18:06] Reverence, you may have heard of her. Reverence your circumstances. Reverence your circumstances. They are God speaking to you. Take yourself seriously in God's presence.

Reverence your circumstances. They are God speaking to you. Or, to paraphrase that, if you will, watch the movements of your affections.
They are a work of providence. I'm in this state of tension. Why has God given me this tension? Why this struggle? Why am I in the presence of a God who casts down, yet offers help?
Why does he give me sour, then sweet? What is God doing with my circumstances?
What is God doing with my affections? Again, the tension in God's presence, as we said, seeks resolution.
[19:15] Again, back to hearing the poem again. I'm going to apologize for that. So the poet says, I will complain about this. I will complain, yet praise.

I will be well. Ah, and approve. And all my, again, sour, sweet days.
I will lament. I will lament all my days. Ah, but God, you haven't tricked me. I will lament and I will love. Ah, tension.
But I'll answer God with my response to his gift of tension. I'll throw back at him this kind of answer. Heaven prayer assaults heaven. It's an engine against the Almighty. God's breath in me, going back to do a little battle with God.
[20:18] This is soul work. Yeah. Still looking at the obvious here. God authors the tension, Herbert is saying, and then moves us to seek resolution.

God's breath in man returning to its birth. Do you ever think of your prayer life as, God gave me the problem I'm praying about. Now he's telling me to seek resolution.
This is the work of the poet and also of ourselves, the reader. This is what Herbert, the pastor, and the poet puts before us.
This kind of vision was taking root. Spirituality of this kind was taking root in early modern Europe, although I'm sure that it was not wholly new then.
But there's certainly this kind of emphasis on prayer as battle and seeking resolution with God in prayer. Here's a passage, for instance.
[21:26] Here's a passage from a much-read author in Herbert's England. He may be, the scholar I mentioned earlier, the Canadian scholar, mentions the hard scholarly work that's been done, just listing the books available in early modern in Herbert's time.

Books left in wills, books in libraries, public and private. There were public libraries. Books here and there. And you can find out who's read a lot, maybe who's read less.
It's not an exact science, but you get some kind of picture. Here's a passage, again, from this much-read author in Herbert's England. It's a bit lengthy, but I hope you'll agree it's wise and worth hearing.
It has obvious reference to what we're looking at here. The author says this, God's showing of himself angry with us is because he loves us, says this author.
God shows himself angry with us because he loves us. It behooveth us to feel his anger effectually.
[22:38] I think that means pay attention to it. Take advantage of God's anger. Find out what he's telling you. To feel his anger effectually. Nevertheless, the same, that is the anger, I take it, says this author, The same is a record of his goodness and a means whereby he calls us to him.

Ah, listen to this author as he continues. He strikes with one hand, so he sets us up with another. Yeah. And if he sends us to the grave, it is to lift us up afterward above the heavens.
So says this author. That is a passage from Calvin's sermons from the book of Job. Calvin's books were everywhere in Herbert's England.
Much read. A theme which Calvin thought quite important, obviously. In the Institutes, Calvin says this. The godly heart feels in itself a division.

That's the tension again. The godly heart feels in itself a division because it is partly imbued with sweetness from its recognition of the divine goodness and partly grieves in bitterness from an awareness of its calamity.
[24:10] Close quote. Now, there's life in this sinful, mixed-up world which seeks resolution from its god.

It would have been, just in passing, from an awareness of its calamity, that would have been common-sense accepted truth in Herbert's England, in Calvin's Geneva, everywhere in Christendom.
Life's a calamity. That's a given. Psalm 90. We live in the midst of God's wrath, Psalm 90 tells us. We're consumed by God's wrath. All of the creation has been subjected to futility.
That's why we die. We're in the midst of a calamity. Accept it. Life is a calamity. And you're going along life's way and you're going to die. You're going to meet God.
What are you doing with your life in the midst of this? It's a given truth for them. Should be, I take it, a given truth for Christians in our, always for us. Yes. Herbert's poem, won't go into this much, may have been directly shaped by these Calvin passages.
[25:20] You know, there's obviously direct echoes. The very language sometimes overlaps. Who knows? May have been directly shaped, or maybe that kind of language would just come in with a lot of authors.

Who knows? We don't know. Nothing turns on that. I want to step back again and just say, here are eight lines of poetry. It's just a little poem. It seems, as I said, it's filled with beauty.
We'll talk about that in a moment. It seems to me, just has simple Christian wisdom, breathing out of every little part of it. Beauty, wisdom. And again, it is prayer.
It's a poem, prayer. In principle, Herbert the poet presents this to his God as prayer. And for our benefit, we can take it up into our lives as prayer, if we want to.
It's spiritual conflict, which again is seeking resolution. Here I am in this world of conflict, times of particular conflict.
[26:26] As a believer, you accept this as a gift from God. The bitterness is a gift from God. The trouble is a gift from God. And God is asking me to deal with it and seek resolution.

This little poem just presents that to us. It gives, isn't it strange, a poem like this that speaks about such challenging things in one sense.
I find, I don't know about you, it gives pleasure. How many times have I read that poem? And I want to read it again. It just gives pleasure.
And Herbert the poet wishes to give us, the reader, pleasure. I'm sure. I find, I find it very pleasurable.
The beauty of it, why to come back to that, observers of Herbert, speak of, you have that poem in front of you, and you have the way it resonates.
[27:22] Herbert's critics speak of, always of the clarity of Herbert. Some poets are not clear. There's clarity here.

There's beauty in clarity. And, and or transparency. It's kind of as if Herbert's teaching us, oh, I won't mislead you. It's really quite simple. Here's clarity, transparency.
I feel, this is often said about, about Herbert. There's just this feel of realism about the way he describes the soul, spiritual affections, the tensions in our lives, the way we seek resolution of, of the tension in, in our prayer life.
Sense of realism, just really, a powerfully present. And this is so interesting. Again, I, I went back and did some Herbert reading.
It's easier the second time around, you know, critics of him. But even critics who do not claim Christian faith often say, ah, I feel realism in Herbert.
[28:31] Why don't you stop and think about that? Why? Even critics who are not, do not claim Christian faith, find this poet, a poem, a poet of realism.

I feel the real world is in this guy's poetry. This is how people experience life. That's interesting. There's always something fresh about Herbert.
It's never, as a rule, sometimes he, he falters a bit, I think, but he's never over elaborated. He doesn't just dazzle you for the sense of dazzling you, as some of the famous metaphysical poets sometimes did.

Herbert's like the oatmeal guy in that crowd. Just say, let's have the straight stuff. And you really enjoy it if you like oatmeal. Beautiful.
Beautiful Scottish oatmeal. Lots of raisins. It was wonderful. You can tell why I'm not a published critic of poetry. This guy talking about oatmeal for him.
[29:34] Nothing feels forced in Herbert. Certainly this poem just seems to just carry along with transparency and the meaning just as profound as it is, you know, you get it.

Yeah, George. My pastor in Christ. My brother in Christ. My Athanasius is. Calvin is. Brother, my brothers and sisters in Christ.
I get this. I hear what you're saying. And that's, I find that's exactly the way this spiritual life is. Yeah. Tension. Difficulty. Providence gives me this set of circumstances.
and then says, move. Move with me. Move with me. Reverence your circumstances and see what I'm saying to you. This is the spiritual life, the spiritual soul work of George Herbert, which he puts before us in these magnificent, magnificent set of poems.
I want to get a bit grand here, sort of moving towards that 935-ish, whatever. A bit grand and go on to, come to me with the end of the clouds for a moment.
[30:45] I remember once, years and years ago, when I did give a talk at Learners Exchange in the other building, a lovely little old woman, excuse me for using that phrase, but she was lovely and she was a woman in Christ.

She came up to me after and said, you live in the clouds, don't you? I always remember that, you know. So I hope, with Herbert, I want to be down to earth and the oatmeal.
But I'm going to do a little cloud work now, a little bit of, the poem's most, most obvious truth, the most obvious thing about this poem, I want to emphasize, most, most, and the tradition that it exemplifies, and Herbert's right in the mainstream of the Christian tradition, I would say.
He can be discussed, he leans this way or he leans that way, but he's essentially in the middle of the Christian tradition. The most obvious thing that it exemplifies might be invisible to us.
We perhaps have forgotten how to effectively say the most obvious thing that this poem presupposes. The poem, and the passage from Calvin that obviously seems to echo Herbert so much, presupposes, to use, here we go into the clouds a bit, it presupposes what the philosophers would call a philosophical anthropology, you know, which is nice, big, fancy language.
[32:10] We need fancy language sometimes. It presupposes that there's a big answer to the question, who do you think you are in the world? You know, it's presupposed in a poem like this.

Really, finally, with your entire thinking, feeling self, who do you really think you finally are in the world? If you will, ontologically, metaphysically.
As I walk about in this world today, since the day I was born, and someday they're going to just, it'll end, and they'll put me in the ground. What is this?
What do I really think is the story here? Who am I to put the me into that question, the philosophical anthropology? Who am I? The self has sources, as the famous Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has taught a couple of generations of us to think with wonderful insight.
The self has sources. We're shaped into thinking often, who, how do we answer that question? Who am I? The self in modernity, again, forgive me, a bit in the clouds, I'll mention her without apology again, in the opinion of Marilyn Robinson, the self in modernity is very diminished.
[33:29] It's her word. We live in a culture which has a deep commitment to denying human exceptionalism, as she says somewhere.

The self is diminished. She also warns you that easy cultural pessimism about the self, or easy cultural pessimism generally, is often just trendy, and we can't merely be pessimistic about, on a topic like this.
The modern self, after all, she would, many thinkers would tell you this, has inherited, the modern self has inherited very much from the Christian tradition.
We can't merely just write it all off. We Christians help produce a lot of it. That's what the modern tradition says about the self. But the self, what a person really, really is, if you like, again, big words, ontologically, who am I finally, is, and I don't think this is really disputed, is imperiled.
The definition of the self right now is imperiled. In our culture, our culture right now, and this is increasingly true, isn't it, for all of us, we recognize this, it's, even the media, which usually takes time to catch up with what's going on in the world, really, our culture battles with everything, with increased passion.

[35:02] And it's one of the reasons for it, is because we don't know who the self is anymore. We're not certain. So we battle about who gets to tell the story of the past, how do we understand selves in the past?

Who gets to tell who are the good guys and the bad guys if there were good guys and bad guys in the past? Who gets to tell that story? What are the arts about? What do they tell us about the self, the humanities generally?
On hot-button issues like abortion and euthanasia and how to define marriage, how you understand a self stands behind all of those hot, disputed issues in our culture.
Who are we? How do we get to define our identity? What is a self? This is again a big complicated question at least in terms of historical, philosophical unfolding.
It's a very fascinating but complicated issue. But for reasons of time and I hope to go right to the heart of the matter, at least one case about the heart of the matter, may we see it in this kind of simple form.
[36:06] The Christian reads a poem like this Herbert poem and this goes to the Christian answer of what a self is.

The Christian reads a poem like Herbert's poem in Christ. Without that, this poem is not what it seems to be, a modern would tell us.
what it says, this poem, what it presupposes is true because, and I think this is quite a defensible thing to say about this poem, this poem is true because Jesus Christ, in a sense, has prayed this poem for us already.
See, Jesus Christ is our identity, Jesus Christ is myself, and it's only in him that I read a poem like Herbert's poem.
That's the Christian definition of the self. The self is in Christ. What it says, what it presupposes is true again because Jesus Christ, in a very real sense, has prayed this poem for us.
[37:27] Prayer, Herbert tells us again, is God's breath in us all, returning to where it came from. We come from Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ has lived and prayed its meaning for us. So I would want to argue, again by way of assertion more than argument, the deep form of this poem, speaking of form, the deep form of this poem is Jesus.
The deepest form of this poem is Jesus Christ. What justifies taking this poem seriously, after all, and this is why I like reading the modern critics who engage with Herbert, and they're very serious people, I honor them very much.
what justifies taking this poem seriously in the year 2018? Is this a bit of Christian nostalgia for the good old days in the 16th and 17th century?
Ah, those were the good old days when guys like Herbert were on the scene. Are we remembering an imagined meaning, a very beautiful, attractive, but an imagined meaning?
[38:50] A profound reader of Herbert, John Drury, a profound scholar of English literature, takes that approach. You know, Herbert can believe in a personal God, that's why he talks about this personal God.

Deep insights into Herbert. He loves Herbert. This guy's a modern. He doesn't believe what Herbert believed. He doesn't believe what we believe. He loves Herbert. But, you know, there's a touch of the imagined meaning in this.
You see, the issue of the self goes to the heart of if you can read this poem with your whole self seriously, or are we just escaping into a little bit of nostalgia with a genius like Herbert, you know? Again, that's why I wanted to emphasize at the opening, a lot of people who aren't Christians really love Herbert. They see his genius. They feel a realism about life, but they don't buy Herbert's understanding of the self.
I do believe Herbert's understanding of the self is true, because with Herbert, I believe that my self, every human self, is ultimately defined by the mystery of Jesus Christ.
[40:05] He's the deep form of this poem. There it is. how we define the human may indeed be diminished in our culture.

Certainly the idea of what a self is is in play in our culture. This is a deep and profound issue. It's why we fight like cats and dogs over who gets to be married and who doesn't.
Should we kill off the elderly at the end, euthanasia? What is a self? Is it a free-floating, moving picture that you make up every day as some of the post-modernists very profoundly tell you that's

what you do every day?
Or is there a kind of essential self that has a meaning in the world? Herbert's self, his understanding of the self comes through in this poem.
His self is Jesus Christ. That's how he understands it. Our definition of every human, each of us alone and together, begins and ends with Jesus Christ.
[41:17] This is what I think the church is going to relearn, I think, in our time. Defining this Jesus is called Christology. Who is Jesus Christ?

Before I ask who I am, the church instructs me, the gospel instructs me, the more important question is to ask this, who is that man named Jesus Christ?
Who is he? Don't ask who you are, Herbert would say, ask who he is. Who is Jesus Christ? It has proven a glorious and difficult thing for the church to learn an appropriate language about Jesus Christ.
The whole Christian tradition, which we should be honored deeply because it worked hard at saying, how are we going to talk about Jesus Christ? Is it going to be Harvey Guest's opinion today based upon his religious experience?
Or am I going to listen to the church of Jesus Christ, the holy catholic church, spending all of its time in holy scripture, trying to find the right language to use about the mystery of that man?
[42:28] It has to be this tradition. It's so difficult to talk about Jesus at one level. as an American novelist says, hey, someone asked me to define light.

Well, shall I start with maybe describing a candle flame? Or maybe I'll start with the sun at its zenith? Or maybe something refracted through a drop of rain, says this novelist.
How do I describe light? Imagine getting your language around what light is coming through these windows. Well, that's what the church is confronted with when it looks at Jesus Christ in the Gospels and says, how will we talk about that man?
How do we talk about him? How are we going to do it? How do we speak with a rhetorical effectiveness, if that's the way it should be? I'm sure it should be.
How do we describe the mystery of this one portrayed in the Gospels and unfolded in all the New Testament? We may at least start by remembering something.
[43:30] I'm racing toward a conclusion here because I want to have time for a conversation and it's 10 to 10 now. We may begin by remembering the past in a Christian manner or through a Christian focus.

Our very understanding of persons, at least in our culture and I think throughout the world increasingly, has been a Christian project and we've forgotten this and we've allowed people from an angry past who don't like the gospel or the church to tell us who persons are.
We're going to have to learn to fight back. What is a person? Well, the Christians really put this question in front of the world and they did it because they were thinking about Jesus Christ.
How do we define a person? The early church fathers, here we go into the clouds again in terms of the past, the early church fathers, the medievals. Strangely enough, and this has been really forgotten, the scholarship catching up with this is good, the renaissance humanists of all people, they all pursued the meaning of the word human as a Christological project.
How do we define who you are, who any person in the world is? Step one, think about Jesus Christ. He's the person of all persons.
[44:56] He defines who every person is. Jesus Christ defines what the word human means. Our origin, our meaning, our future are all revealed in Jesus.

And the early church fathers especially said, something new is in the world. We've got a human who is also God. And that is our destiny, to be united to God because God has already done it for us in the mystery of the second person of the Trinity who took up into its life Jesus of Nazareth. That's how you define the human. Amazing story. How do we define the human? It's a Christian story. We have to learn our way of answering this question.
All of which, of course, is a big, big vision, but I would think it is simply true and the Christian church is going to, I hope, relearn its own story, relearn the profundity of the gospel as it defines what a human is.
Jesus Christ is the deep, deep, deep form of this poem. Otherwise, this poem is a piece of nostalgia, a bit of remembering and imagine meaning from the past that gives weak-minded people a bit of comfort.

[46:22] that's what shrewd, articulate unbelief would tell us. And we have to out-shrewd the shrewd unbelievers.

In Christ, to go to a conclusion, leaning a lot here on the wonderful Jens Zimmerman from Trinity Western, who's an expert on Renaissance humanism and its struggles with the definition of the self, again, in early, early modernity, in Christ, there is nothing less than a Christian humanism for us all to learn.
Jesus Christ is the true humanism. It is, in the words of Mr. Zimmerman, an incarnational humanism. You know, it's this amazing truth of the gospel which has been unfolded, but it waits to be unfolded again and deeper and deeper.
It is a philosophy of culture, for instance, for the church in the world. You know, how do we deal with politics and economics, hot-button issues that don't need to be listed, how we deal with everything as we deal with the mystery of our neighbors who don't know it, but their identities are really Christ-given.
He's the one through whom all things were created. their real identity is Jesus Christ. They just don't know it. That's why our neighbor is so profound, why we love our enemies, why we forgive seventy times seven, why mercy and kindness and gentleness are the Lord's first demand for us every day.
[48:12] it's because the people you're dealing with are his image. The profundity of what a self is is revealed by Jesus.

The deep self of a beautiful little poem by George Herbert is Jesus Christ. This Christian humanism, named or unnamed, has changed many things and I think we need to recover the impact of this incarnational humanism.
Sometimes it's done for us by unbelief. They see what the Christians have done and they note it. They know. We may forget it. I am not ashamed of the gospel, says Paul.
It is the power of God unto salvation. And that doesn't just mean going to heaven when you die. It means God's salvation wants to change the world. The world that he loves.
Culture, the arts, politics, economics, all gets shaped by the Christian presence, like a mirror held up to the world and saying, there's what human beings are.
[49:20] Mysteries created in God's image. Reborn in Christ, the second Adam is the head of the race now. Do we take this mystery of Jesus seriously?

All this power has again shown itself in many, many ways. I must draw to a close, even in this little way that I put in front of you today.
I so enjoy reading the beauty, the wisdom, the simple humanity of this poem. Oh, my dear angry Lord.
Yes, I will lament and I will love. I will lament and love. Why, again, why have so many over three or more centuries now loved this poetry.
Again, believer and unbelievers alike. I've come to believe, again, as I've been reading these poems again the last few weeks and refreshing my memory of the scholarship that's out there about George, I believe unbelief sees the artistry of this man, he sees the beauty of such a poem, but it sees its wisdom and perhaps it's lured to something.
[50:39] I think profound readers of this poetry, again, believers and unbelievers alike, are drawn to its humanity. Here is a wonderful way to be a human being.

I wonder what Herbert knew about the way to be human that is so beautiful here. It's because Herbert knows who he is in Christ. He knows what the drama is that we're experiencing along life's way here of spiritual tension seeking resolution.
Here is simple humanity. Here is Herbert's I'd call it, here is an example of this poem of incarnational humanism. Here's how Jesus has taught a saint to pray.
Pray this way to my father. You could line up prayers from Jesus and things from the gospels and the whole of scripture right next every line in Herbert's poem.
Herbert's mind is just moving inside the scriptural mystery here. Here we the beauty of the Lord I think is in a poem like this. I think that's why people are drawn to Christian works like this.
[51:55] Herbert's constant theme. One of his poems begins, I love it so much wounded, he says, I sing. We're all wounded but we're called to sing. Wounded, I sing.

Jesus, wounded on the cross and Easter is singing. The whole drama of the Christian life, kill me, not every day, thou Lord of life.

It's a theme that Herbert just keeps repeating. Or as Calvin put it, he's going to put you in a grave someday, the Lord, but then he's going to raise you up above the skies.
It's an amazing story. This is how to be a human according to the Christian mystery. And we can tell the world this happy news. This is how you define a human.
This is it. Lament and love. There it is, George Herbert on a Sunday morning. It's almost ten. Let me say a word of prayer and then you can tell me where I've gone wrong here or whatever.
[52:56] Lord, we thank you for your servant, George Herbert. We thank you for the witness to the gospel that he has left behind.

And may all Christian works of art, all unfoldings of the gospel, whatever the form they take, may we love them more and more as they teach us along life's way to love you more and more, as you teach us in pain and sorrow to seek the resolution of your healing love which will last for eternity. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.