

Jesus - One Among Many?

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Preacher: Andrew Reid

[0 : 00] They were created to relate to him, but there's a force which pushes them to live independently from him. And that independence affects the way they think, the way they act, the way they relate, speak, and so on.

It affects nearly every part of their being, and it affects every one of them. See, all human beings are like this, these passages are saying. None is exempt from this disposition, this nature, this character.

So now we've got a picture of who God is, not complete, as I said, and a picture of who human beings are, not complete either. We could put other things up front, but here is a strong picture presented throughout the Bible of both things.

Now, I know I've been somewhat sensitive in my choice of passages, but I want to tell you that these passages are indeed representative passages.

They capture what the Bible says in a whole lot of ways and in its entirety. Other passages might add some extra things. They might give us some ways of fine-tuning the portrait that we have here of our participants.

[1 : 10] Nevertheless, the personality profile of each of the participants wouldn't change much in the end. On one side, what do we have? A God who is holy, sovereign, a creator, and a judge.

A being who cannot live with impurity or sin. A being who cannot live with other human beings, with other beings that are sinful. Here is God who is pure and holy and cannot tolerate being in the presence of sin and unholiness.

On the other side, we see humanity. And humanity are prone to independence. They seek to do their own thing their own way. In other words, they are sinful.

They are opposed to living the way that their creator designed them for living and intended them to live. So do you think that we could get these two parties together, given their inbuilt dispositions and personalities?

Could we put them in a room and have them live okay with each other for very long? Answer is clear, isn't it? It's a categorical no. There are polar opposites, as it were.

[2 : 17] The gap between the participants is enormous. And sin has separated them. Not anything that God has done, but what the humans have done. Coexistence is impossible.

There is an apparent stalemate. On the one hand, God cannot simply forgive and forget human sinfulness and remain holy. And humans cannot change their fundamental nature.

Maybe, however, maybe there is hope. After all, we are dealing with God here, aren't we? And this God is the God of that Isaiah and the rest of the Bible tells us is not only holy, but also compassionate, merciful, kind and forgiving.

In the words of Exodus 34, he's the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God. In the words of Isaiah 59, verse 1, he's a God whose arm is not so short that it cannot save.

So perhaps there may be a way out of this impasse if God is all of those things. But whatever way this way is, it will have to be a way that doesn't involve God compromising his nature, won't it?

[3 : 24] He must remain God. And human independence, rebellion and sin must be recognised for what it is. Sin must be dealt with as sin. And the Bible tells us that God has shouted a clear yes to our instinctive hope.

You see, he's found a way in which mercy might triumph over judgment. God has a yes. And that yes is found in the sending of his son into the world and his death on a cross.

You see, when Jesus is lifted up on the cross, God shouts out to his world, look here. Look here. Yes, it is possible. I can meet with humanity.

I can meet with you. And the New Testament writers are clear that in the cross, God brings relationship with him into the realms of possibility. In the cross, humans are declared to be human.

That is, they are independent and they deserve judgment. In the cross, sin is seen in all its awfulness. It is awful and separating. And in the cross, God is God.

[4 : 37] He's holy, just, sovereign, merciful, loving and saving. He's all of those things. And that's what our last passage captures, the one from Romans 3, 21 to 26. But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed and attested to by the law and the prophets.

The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. You see, that's everyone. They are now, they now, though, are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith.

That is, through believing in Jesus. He did this to show his righteousness because in his divine forbearance, he passed over sins previously committed. And it was to prove that at the present time, at the present time, that he is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

Did you hear that? So he remains God and yet he saves. Please understand what I'm saying. I've deliberately presented things the way that I have. You see, the issues that we are talking about are real spiritual issues.

They have to do with God and his nature. They have to do with us and our nature. And we have decided, we have to decide what set of beliefs fit.

[6 : 05] And my own view is that it is in this area that Christ and Christian faith distinguishes itself. You see, what it does is it takes the uniform and univocal portrait of God from the Bible seriously.

That is, it says God is not a good genial gentleman. No, he's everything you'd expect God to be. He is holy. He cannot tolerate evil.

But his whole disposition is also toward grace and mercy and compassion. You see, he longs for the people, for relationship with the people that he has created. With his creation, he longs to be reconciled with all his heart.

And Christianity not only takes God seriously, but it takes sin seriously. It acknowledges what is plainly obvious to anyone who has eyes to see that humans are inclined towards self-centeredness.

And this means they will be invariably inclined toward evil. For evil is simply doing what is good for you at all costs, isn't it? Christianity acknowledges these two things.

[7 : 18] It acknowledges who God is and his character. It acknowledges who we are and our character. And it asserts that if we are to be in relationship with God, then something outside of ourselves needs to happen.

We cannot be saved or reborn or made whole or achieve fulfillment without external intervention. We cannot pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, as it were.

We need help. And Christianity tells us that God does the only thing that is possible. That is, he acts on our behalf and he acts in surprising grace and he becomes a human being in Jesus.

And as a human being, he acts as no human being has acted previously in unselfishness and total obedience to God. And as the one righteous human being, the only righteous human being, he takes the punishment of all human beings upon himself.

He turns his anger, as it were, against himself. And mercy triumphs over judgment. At one and the same time. Can you see it?

[8 : 23] God is holy and gracious. Sin is sinful and shameful. Both are true. And all of this is to be found in the person of Jesus.

You see, amongst all faiths, and here's where we get to the nub of our problem for tonight. Amongst all faiths, that which is founded on Jesus Christ is unique in this way.

Christianity is unique. It is not an attempt to seek after God and find him. No, it is a revelation. It is an action that comes from God, a revelation that comes from God.

It is a revelation by God. It's a self-revelation by God as to what he is like. A revelation by God our make as to what we are like. It's a revelation in Jesus of how God has met both these things and made reconciliation possible.

Please understand what I'm saying. All religions are not basically the same. Christianity says some fundamentally different things. For Christianity speaks about Jesus.

[9 : 32] And beside him, everything else pales into insignificance. He is the fulfillment of all human hopes and aspirations in relation to God.

He is the embodiment of truth and righteousness. He is the incarnation of all that is good and true. He is the saviour of the world.

Friends, I want to urge you tonight to abandon the myths that the world presents us with. I want you to abandon the false ideas that our world has about God.

And I want you to abandon the false ideas that you have about God. Many religions do capture truths about God. But none of them capture fully the truth of God found in Jesus.

Jesus. And not only that, none of them, apart from Christian faith, solve the problem revealed in Jesus. Many religions tell us about humanity.

[10 : 31] Many of them portray humanity as inclined toward evil. But none of them capture fully the truth about humanity that is found in Jesus. Jesus is unique in the world of religions.

He alone is the way, the truth and the life as he himself declares. At which point he must either be lying or telling the truth. If he's right.

And certainly, God through him presents us and God correctly. Without him, we are left with a truncated view of God.

And a warped view of humanity. So I want to urge you tonight to flee to Jesus. To inquire more about him. To investigate him further. And if you're already Christian, to proclaim him.

For he alone is the hope of the world. He alone is the hope of the world. He's not one amongst many. He's one unique. So let me pray.

[11 : 36] Father God, we thank you. For your revelation of yourself in the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray, Father, that you would draw us to Jesus.

And drive us to him. As the only saviour of the world. As the way, the truth and the life. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.