

God is... Spirit

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[0:00] God is.

So today, God is spirit. They're the words that Jesus said, aren't they? John 4, 24. He's speaking with a woman in the middle of a very hot day in Samaria at a well.

It's a place that Jewish people didn't normally go to visit. They kind of avoided it, but Jesus deliberately goes to that place. It's full of people that weren't kosher.

The Jewish people thought that Samaritans, they were mixed breeds. They had no time for them. They were people that were sort of Jewish, but not really. And Jesus has this conversation with a woman who's there in the middle of the day because of her shame.

And Jesus makes this statement in verse 24, God is spirit. God is spirit. So Jesus said it, and so we believe it.

[1:26] And that settles it. But what does it mean? If Jesus said it, it must be true. It must be important. But what does it mean that God is spirit? And so what I want to do this morning is talk about what it means that God is spirit and what it means for us.

Three things on that first point. What does it mean? God is, first of all, the original uncreated spirit. He's the original uncreated spirit.

There are other spirits. God is not the only spirit. According to the Bible, angels are spirits. We have spirits.

You and I have human bodies. And we have spirits as well as bodies. We are not just bodies, are we? Angels are created.

And we are created. We're not uncreated. But God, in contrast, God is uncreated. You and I were born into existence.

[2:31] And we were born, angels were created. There was a time when angels didn't exist. God made them, but nobody made God. There has never been a time when God did not exist.

Have you thought about that? I remember thinking about that when I was a little boy. And I've tried to think about it this week. And it blows my mind. My mind can't cope with it. My mind can't comprehend something that didn't have a beginning.

If you try to think about it now, it's impossible. It's impossible for us to comprehend. But it's not impossible for it to be true.

Because it is true. It is true of God. God has no beginning. God owes his existence to nobody else. You and I, we owe our existence under God to our parents.

God owes his existence to nobody. So there are other spirits. Angels are spirits. We have spirits. But God is unique. There's nobody like him. He is the uncreated, original spirit.

[3:38] In the letter of Hebrews, Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 9, he's called the father of spirits. In other words, he is the one who created all spirits. And so that's the first thing Jesus is saying when he says God is spirit.

He's saying God is the original uncreated spirit from whom all other spirits come. Secondly, when Jesus says God is spirit, he's telling us that God has no body. God has nothing material, physical about him at all.

Do you remember the time after Jesus' resurrection when he appears to his disciples after the resurrection? It's Luke chapter 24 and verse 39.

And they're gathered in a room and they are confused. They're really discouraged. And Jesus appears in the middle of them. And he stands with them in the middle of the room. And in the conversation, he asks for something to eat.

Why did he do that? He was hungry. Well, yes. But he did that to prove to them and to you and I that he was really risen. He was bodily risen from the dead.

[4:48] He said to them this. He said, a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have. So Jesus is saying he wasn't just spirit.

But he is telling us there, isn't it, what a spirit is. A spirit does not have flesh and bones. A spirit has nothing physical about it.

God has no body. And so we must banish and put away in our thoughts any thinking that God has bodily parts like you and I do. He has no limbs.

He has no head. He has no face. He has no inner organs. Nothing of that kind. He is spirit, as Jesus says. Now that is very difficult, isn't it?

Difficult for you and I to really get our minds around. And to think of God in that way because we don't really know what a spirit is. But it's clear from scripture, from that verse in Luke 24 and elsewhere, that a spirit has nothing physical.

[5:50] Nothing material about it at all. That's what God is. God is spirit. So when the Bible speaks of God's hands, as it does, and speaks of his fingers, and speaks of his arm, and speaks of his eyes, and speaks of his heart, the Bible uses all those terms, doesn't it, about God.

You don't have to look very far to find the Bible using those terms about God. What is it doing? The Bible is using human terms to tell us something true about God, but it's not speaking literally.

We're not to think literally that God has a hand, or that God has an arm. We say Jesus is seated at the right hand of God.

We're not to literally think that there's a massive great arm in heaven that Jesus is sitting by. The Bible speaks about God's eyes searching us and searching the earth.

And we're not to think literally of God with eyes. What the Bible means when it uses that kind of language is that God's arm is his strength.

[7:00] It's talking about his strength and his power. When it talks of his fingers, it is talking about the intricacy of how he made us.

It's talking about his skill in creation. When it talks about God's hand, it's talking about God's action. It's saying God is at work. Or when it speaks of God's eyes, it's speaking of his knowledge of what's happening, his knowledge of us.

When it speaks of God's heart, it speaks of his plans and intentions and so on. And so when you read those things in the Bible, don't take them absolutely literally true. And think, well, God has those things.

He has a kind of massive eye like Sauron. But understand, the Bible is using those terms to speak to us in ways that we can understand.

God is a spirit. He doesn't actually have physical properties. Neither does he, strictly speaking, have feelings in the way that we do.

[8:06] Feelings belong to the body, don't they? And when you love somebody, when you hate something, it produces a feeling in you because you're physical. Because you've got a body. The feeling you have when you love someone, that feeling is not actually the essence of love.

I hope you understand that love is much more than a feeling. I know a lot of people talk about love just as a feeling. And so sometimes people come to see me and they say, well, I don't feel like I love my wife anymore.

I want to say to them, I couldn't get less. Love is not feelings. And if you lose your feelings, you think, well, I've lost my love. You realize that's nonsense, isn't it?

Love is much deeper. Love is much richer. Love is much more solid than a feeling. Love is much more solid than a feeling. We have feelings because we love others. And we have those feelings because we have bodies.

The physical part of us produces those feelings. But God does not have a body. And so he does not have feelings in the way that we have them.

[9:12] Now, that doesn't mean that he doesn't love, of course. It doesn't mean that God doesn't show mercy or hate sin or pity us in our difficulties. But when we think of God in these terms, strictly in relation to God, we are talking about something greater, richer, deeper than just feelings.

When we talk, when we read about God's love, what we're saying is, what the Bible is saying, God has this settled determination within him.

This absolute determination that he is going to do you good. That's what love is. And he's going to do good for his people.

And God loves his church. And he has a love for those for whom he died. And that love indicates to us, if you are a Christian this morning, that should give you great comfort and satisfaction in the knowledge that whatever happens, if you have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, God's settled determination is that he is for you.

That's what Romans 8 is teaching us. He is for you. And all that happens is under God's control and authority. And ultimately, however horrible it may seem this morning, God is saying, ultimately, this will work out for your good.

[10:42] And I don't say that lightly. Because it's not just about feelings. It's much deeper and richer than that. When I say that God does not have feelings, you must not jump in your mind to think, oh, well, Paul is saying that God must be like a stone.

That God is cold. It's quite the opposite. God's love burns eternally and infinitely for his people. Just as his righteousness results in terrible judgment.

He has an eternal hatred of sin. And so when Jesus says God is spirit, we're saying that he is the original uncreated spirit.

But we're saying he does not have a body like we do. Thirdly, it tells us, the Bible tells us that he is invisible. That clearly follows, isn't it? If you haven't got a body, if you don't have any physical parts, then you can't be perceived.

You can't be seen by us. The Bible tells you very, very clearly that God is invisible. And Colossians chapter 1 verse 15 speaks of the invisible God.

[11:51] It uses that expression. 1 Timothy 1 verse 17, when Paul is in a doxology praising God, he says, God is the king of the ages, immortal. That means he will never die.

Invisible. So he can't be seen. And so God can't be perceived by human sense at all. God can't be seen. God can't be touched.

God can't be tasted. There is no way in which we can physically perceive God. The Bible says in John chapter 1 and verse 18, no man has seen God.

Why? Because he's invisible. Because he is spirit. Now if you read your Bible, you've got some questions in your mind, you think, well, what about those times in the Old Testament when God appeared?

So in the Garden of Eden, we're told that God walked with Adam in the cool of the day. Adam is obviously able to see him in some way.

[12:55] Or think of Abraham. If you read Genesis 18 really carefully, you can see that those men met God and they gave him a meal. That was the Lord. Or Joshua, at the beginning of the book of Joshua, meets the commander of the Lord's army, and it's very clear that he's met the Lord himself.

What's happening there? Paul, you're saying that God is invisible, but in those instances, it's clear God appears to people, and he can be seen. What's happening? Well, yes, God appears.

He takes on, in those cases, a human appearance, a human form. Not in the way that Jesus did when he was born, of course, as a baby, as a true human being, but God takes on a human form so that he can be seen.

But in himself, he is invisible. They are simply appearances of God. They are simply a form that God takes for those purposes.

The Lord takes a form for those purposes, to speak and deal with individuals at that particular time. But it's not how he truly is. It's not how he really is. God is truly invisible and cannot be seen.

[14:00] He is the original uncreated spirit. He has no bodily parts. He has no body, and he is invisible. And then fourthly and finally on this, we need to say this, don't we?

Jesus Christ, who is God, became flesh, became human. And so fourthly, Jesus Christ has revealed God to us.

So I quoted that verse from John 1 that I mentioned a moment ago, no one has seen God. No one has seen God. At any time, okay, he's invisible, but then it goes on to say, isn't it, but the only begotten?

Jesus Christ has declared him. Jesus Christ came into this world to show us God. He reveals God to us in a way that has not been revealed before.

The Old Testament tells us about God. It tells us who God is. It tells us what he's like. It tells us a great deal about him.

[15:15] But now, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come into our world to show us what God is like, to switch the lights on. And he shows us what God is like in the way that he lived, in the things

that he did.

He is God made flesh. He's God become flesh. He has taken on, added to himself, a human nature for our sakes.

He is the final revelation of God to us. You will not find anything more about God than you find in Jesus Christ. And so, other religions, there's no point in looking to them because they will not tell you the truth there may be elements of truth in them, but there's a great deal of false.

But they will tell you nothing that you will not find in Jesus Christ. Philosophy, your own reason, your experiences, none of those things will add to what you will find about God in Jesus Christ.

In fact, they're likely to lead you astray and they will deceive you. And so, if you want to know what God is like, you look at Jesus Christ. And you look at him as he is revealed to us in the scriptures.

[16:29] Do not think that you need a vision of Jesus or dreams about Jesus. Now, I know some of you have had that. And I know that God can use those things to bring you to himself amazingly.

I don't deny that. But the Bible's really clear. If you want to know what God is like, you read about Jesus Christ in the scriptures, in the gospels, as he's prophesied in the Old Testament, as the apostles speak to him, speak of him in their letters, they read the scriptures and what they teach you about Jesus because in Jesus you see God because Christ has become, has been made flesh. And so you look at Jesus and what do you see? You see his love. You read the gospels and you see his love. You go to this story in John 4 and you'll see that Jesus wants to do her good.

She comes to the well. He's got no reason to talk to her. In fact, in that culture, for a man to talk to a Jewish woman who's got a pretty shady past, it was unthinkable in lots of ways.

But he does speak with her. He cares for her. Why? Because he wants to do her good. And that tells you something about God this morning. Whoever you are, however low you may feel this morning, however you might feel that others in this room take no notice of you or want nothing to do with you or no one can help you in your problems, that's not true of Jesus Christ.

[18:05] Jesus cares for you as he cared for this woman. And he wants to do you good. And that tells you something about God. It tells you that God cares for you. That whatever others may think, however others may feel about you, makes no difference because God cares for you and he wants to do you good if you will listen to him and respond to him.

And so as you read the gospels, we see, don't we, again and again, Christ's compassion for those who are in trouble and in life's difficulties. For those who are ill. For those who have children where there just seems to be no answer for their condition.

For those who are struggling and battle with anxiety. For those who are weighed down with sin.

How does Christ deal with them? He pities them. And he shows compassion to them.

For those who are weighed down with guilt and sin. He shows love to them. And when he sees the crowds, when he's exhausted, do you know what it's like to be exhausted, isn't it?

When you're tired. If you're anything like me, when you're really tired and you're really exhausted, you don't want to see anyone. You want to kind of disappear into a screen or a book.

[19:17] You want to be on your own and recover. But when Jesus is in that condition, when he's absolutely spent, he's had a day full of people and ministry. He'd taken off from his disciples to be alone.

And suddenly the crowds find out where he is and they come. And the Bible says, when he saw these crowds as an exhausted man, this is how he responded. He didn't say, oh, good grief. I need to get away from these people.

It says he had compassion on them. He felt for them. He looked at this crowd when he's absolutely spent and he says, they are like sheep without a shepherd. And they had nobody to provide for them.

nowhere else to go. And so he is kind, doesn't he? This woman in John chapter 4, go home and read it.

Read between the lines. It's obvious that Jesus could have ignored her. He could have brushed her off. But he's kind to her. He speaks gently with her. He wants to help her. And you see that all the way through the Gospels.

[20:18] And you want to know what God is like? God is kind. Again, this morning, you might feel you're very down and you're very low. And you might feel, well, nobody's helping me.

Well, God is kind. And if you will come to him, you will find that he is a kind God who will help you in a way that you cannot imagine or get from anyone else.

you see Christ's righteousness. You see, Jesus in the Gospels angry. He's angry with religious hypocrisy. He's angry with those in the temple who are using kind of God's house to make money. They are defiling the place of God's holiness. They're using what is for God. They come to a place of worship and they turn it into a way of making money. And Jesus has got some very strong things to say to people like that.

He's angry with them because he is righteous and holy. We see Jesus weeping over the city of Jerusalem because of their hardness of heart and their refusal to trust him.

[21 : 23] And we see him at a graveside going to a friend's grave and weeping bitter tears and he loves the bereaved family. And even though he knows he's going to raise the dead man from the grave, he sees his friends grieving and he weeps with them.

And maybe this morning you've been bereaved and you've lost someone you love and Jesus knows and he has compassion with you if you will come to him. And he will provide comfort and help to you.

In all of this, what I'm trying to get through to you is this. We are seeing God as we see Jesus in the scriptures. And if you're a Christian, if you're a believer this morning, one day our hope is to see God, isn't it?

It's what the Bible tells us. One day we will see God. 1 Corinthians 3 verse 2, we shall see him as he is. Sorry, 1 John 3, 2.

1 Corinthians 13, 12 says we will see him face to face and I will be known as I am known. But I've taught you that God is invisible.

[22 : 35] So who will we see? We will see Jesus. There's not some God hiding behind Jesus. No, when we see Christ, we see God.

Jesus himself said, doesn't it, he who has seen me has seen the Father. And in glory, we will see Jesus Christ, God in his fullness. God is a spirit without body, without parts, without passions, as the old confession puts it.

He is invisible. But he's revealed himself to us fully and finally in the Lord Jesus, the incarnate Son of God. Now what does this mean? Three things that it means.

First of all, it means this. It means that you and I can begin to understand ourselves. And we need to know this about God so that we understand ourselves.

People today in the city in which we live, they don't understand themselves. You have this problem like me, I think, that there are times when we do something that we are absolutely shocked by.

[23 : 44] Or we find ourselves saying something and we find, I don't even understand myself. What makes me tick? We don't understand ourselves and so much of our problems but actually in our culture today, if you go to school or college, you'll come up against this.

It'll be the same with people in work. They think of themselves just as bodies. Nothing more. We said at the beginning, we are spirits as well as bodies.

People tend not to believe that. They think of themselves as bodies and just chemicals, physical properties. And if you press them and drive them to the conclusion, they may well say, well, everything you feel, everything you do, it's really the result of a chemical reaction and a kind of electric phenomenon.

The physical effects on your body, the elements that make up your body can be explained in that way. But if that is true, that's really depressing. And in fact, no one really actually lives like that.

If that's all you are, there's no reason for you to do anything good. Because what does good or evil mean if we're just a collection of chemicals or electrical impulses? You've got nothing to hope for.

[24 : 59] Hope makes no sense if you're just a bundle of physical particles. Life has no meaning or no significance if that's all we are. If you're just a chemistry experiment, well, what's the point?

But in fact, everybody knows that that's not true, don't they? Okay. In fact, as you listen to me, you think, no, that can't be true. You have plans.

You are able to say to yourself, I have hopes. There are things that I want to do. There are people I want to meet. There are things I want to see. There are things I want to achieve in life. There is good and there is evil and you know it.

And you know that there are things that are good. You know that there are things that you ought to do and you don't always do them. But you know you ought to do them. And there are things that you know that you should not do but you end up doing them.

You are more than chemicals. What are you? Well, you are spirit as well as body. There is more to you. There is more to you than just your physical components. You are made, the Bible tells you, in the image of God.

[26:02] And what that means is not that physically we look like God, not at all. No, our spirits, in our spirits, we have a resemblance to God. And that resemblance has been spoiled and it has been ruined by our sin but nevertheless it remains to some extent.

We are made in the image of God and we have spirits. You have spirits. That's why you think some things are good and some things are evil, some things are right and some things are wrong. Because you have this resemblance to God who is the source of all good and who opposes all evil. And that's why you can be happy and why you can be miserable and why you can love some things and hate other things. That's why you can be very content and peaceful and it's why you can be agitated in your spirit.

because your spirit is real. And that's your experience. That's why you can say I. That's why you can say that you know that you exist in distinction from other people.

You have a sense that you are you because you have a spirit. It is not just physical chemicals and so on. You wouldn't have that sense. You are conscious of yourself.

[27:11] You are spirit as well as body because you are made in the image of God. So we need this truth about God to help us understand ourselves that we're spirits.

We are like God although we're very different from him in many senses but in that sense we are like him. We have a spirit as well as a body. Now number two we need to understand this to understand our sin. Can you see that sin disobedience begins inside of us?

If you like in our spirits sin is not just a matter of doing wrong things. Sometimes we think that don't we? Telling lies committing adultery those are things that we do with our bodies. They are sin but if we understand what we're thinking about this morning we'll see these things begin within us.

They don't start with our bodies. They start in our spirits. It's why Jesus says out of the heart comes evil thoughts murder adultery sexual immorality theft false witnesses lying slander.

They're actions. That is described in those lists. It's a list of things that we do but they come from the heart. And when he says heart he doesn't mean internal organ that pumps blood around.

[28:23] He means your inner self. He means your spirit. That's where those evil actions and thoughts come from. And God sees all that because God is spirit.

And if your spirit is wrong and God is a spirit he sees our spirit and he looks within us and he sees us clearly exactly as we are. Not just in what we do but in our thoughts in our plans in our imaginations in our desires and it's not difficult for him to see.

It's not a problem for him. We are laid bare before him. It's what the psalmist said isn't it? You discern my thoughts from afar. It's not difficult for God to do. He can see what you're thinking now. He can see how bored you are now. It's not a problem for him. David says in that same word doesn't he? He says even before a word is on my tongue Lord you know it completely. How does he know that?

How does he know that? Well he knows the future. He knows everything that's going to happen but it's more than that. David is saying he knows your spirit. He knows what's in you and Jesus says it's from your heart that comes out these terrible things.

[29:32] He knows this morning what you're going to say before you say it. He knows the thoughts before you think them. Hebrews chapter 4 verse 12 says the living word of God that is Christ penetrates the division of soul and spirit of joints and marrow discerns the thoughts and attentions of the heart.

Christ knows all that we are in every way to the very depths of our being. Christ knows you better than you know yourself. He knows that all is in our spirits inwardly.

Nothing is hidden. That's where our sin originates. That's why we're fallen creatures because sin is in the very depths of our being. That's why we're unacceptable to God.

It's why thinking about God makes us uncomfortable because we become conscious of our sin. And the more we understand this the more we understand how terrible my sin is in the sight of God and why I need a saviour.

why I need a saviour who can truly wash me from my sin who can take away the sin at the very depths of my being and not just my outside actions but he can deal with my heart and he can create a new heart within me.

[30:42] And it's only the blood on the cross that can do that. Your self-help your kind of reformation isn't going to help you. And that's why the Bible says to you really clearly you must trust him.

You must come to Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins, yes but for a washing from the inward filth of your heart. And if you come to him and you will find if you put your trust in him that you will find he cleanses your spirit.

And I know people in our society they think this is nonsense they think this is just made up to make us feel better but the Bible has taught us this for thousands of years and millions of people have found it to be true around the world it's true.

That if you come to Christ you will find forgiveness for all your sins and you will find that inwardly as well as outwardly. You can be cleansed from your sin and forgiven and reconciled with God so you need to understand this.

Lastly we need to understand this we need this so that we might be those who worship in spirit and in truth. Can you see there's a connection here between what we're thinking and what we're doing this morning worshipping God.

[31:54] Our worship of God as we gather in this way on the Lord's Day your worship of God is to be spiritual. True worship of God doesn't require a beautiful building or architecture it doesn't require great clothing or choirs or all the rest of it.

It is to be orderly yes it is good to have somewhere reasonably comfortable to meet and safe but true worship does not require beauty in those things.

the essence of worship true worship is inward it's the state of your heart as you come this morning. That's not to say that the things that we do and the things that we say outwardly and how we do it is completely irrelevant don't misunderstand me but it begins in the heart.

The heart of true worship is inward and God is a spirit and those who worship him Jesus says must worship him in spirit and in truth. We've thought of the fact that God is invisible if you think of the second commandment it forbids us to make any image of God.

We're not to have any pictures or representations of God of any kind it's a direct transgression of the commandment. It's why many Christians over the centuries have taken that to mean that pictures of Jesus should be forbidden because he is God we're not to make any image of God.

[33:12] We're to take our ideas about God not from pictures or paintings but from his word. And we're to worship him in spirit and in truth and the truth of God's word informs our worship and it tells us what he's like and so when we come to worship whether it's privately at home as families or whether it's a gathering like this it's our hearts and in our minds that we come to prepare to worship.

And we come confessing our sin acknowledging our guilt because if we're not doing that we're not actually worshipping in truth. We're not recognising who we truly are in the sight of God.

We're not recognising his holiness and his righteousness and so we come humbly focusing on God remembering that we're coming to him the creator of all things without beginning without end with all power and knowledge who rules all things.

And so when we come on a Sunday morning we're not primarily coming to meet with each other although it's great to meet together. We're coming first of all to God and so we need to remember when we gather on a Sunday morning get your head and your mind in that right condition of humility and reverence before our holy God.

That's why formality is such a plague in worship isn't it? Because you might look like on the outside you're singing with gusto but in your heart you're thinking about what you're doing during the week. Your heart's not engaged.

[34:33] It can look can't it really lively or it can look really sombre but the same problem can be there. And we're to worship in spirit and truth. When we read the Bible we listen and we remember that God is speaking.

That it's not just the person the minister reading the scriptures it is God speaking to us. And when you listen to the sermon our mind's fully engaged it's not elsewhere because it's the Lord Jesus Christ speaking to us.

Formal worship doesn't engage the heart and mind. And that's the problem with it and it's an abomination of God. Worship is to be in spirit and truth because God is spirit.

He's invisible. The son of God the Lord Jesus Christ took upon himself a human nature. He became man to show us God and what he's like.

That we can know God in our current condition. Jesus Christ died on the cross so that you could be washed from your sin inwardly and thoroughly and completely once and for all if your faith and trust is in him and we are to trust him to trust in Jesus Christ and his death at Calvary for salvation and reconciliation with him.

[35 : 57] God who is spirit who is so wonderful so kind so compassionate and yet he hates sin. He hates your sin with all of his being. but to trust Christ and be saved from our sin and from death and from hell.

Let's pray. Amen.