

Metaphysics And Me. Part 3

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[0 : 00] But tonight I'd like us to turn to the opening words of John's Gospel and let me read verses 1-3. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. And in our evening services just now, we are in the midst of a rather strangely titled series called Metaphysics and Me.

And that's a very complicated sounding title, and it maybe seems like a complicated topic. And in some ways it is. In our evening services just now, we're maybe looking at aspects of theology that are stretching us maybe further than we would normally go.

But that can be a good thing to do from time to time. And all of it's helpful because it's getting us to think more closely about just how vast and how glorious God is.

That title, Metaphysics and Me, always begs the question, what do we mean when we talk about metaphysics? And basically what that is referring to is the biggest questions of life.

[1 : 14] Metaphysics is exploring the stuff that goes beyond physics. Questions of being, of first principles, of ultimate reality.

So physics might ask the question, you know, how does the universe function? Metaphysics asks the question, what is the universe? Where did it come from? What lies beyond it?

And what actually is space and time and matter and information and energy? And over that, what is the ultimate reality that holds it all together? So metaphysics is taking us into the realm of philosophy, into the questions of absolutes and ultimates.

And all of that can sometimes seem a bit abstract and complicated, but yet it's actually incredibly relevant. Because you and I are going into a new day tomorrow and we're in this thing called life, living on this planet that's suspended in this thing called the universe.

And this thing called time has gone on from one day into the next. We're all part of it. What's it all about? What's going on?

[2 : 19] Where did it come from? Where's it going? And so metaphysics and me is an opportunity for us to spend five Sunday evenings looking at this.

And in this series, we are looking really at two sub-areas of theology. We're looking at creation and providence.

And we spent the last two Sundays looking at creation. We're going to have a final Sunday evening looking at creation before the next two weeks, looking together at providence. And I want to take our starting point, John chapter 1, verses 1 to 3.

But we'll be looking at lots of other parts of the Bible and we'll be making mention of Proverbs 8 that Una read for us. We've got three key points this evening. They are, creation was created by God.

Creation was created by God, the Holy Trinity. Creation was created by the Word of God, the Holy Trinity. And those three headings are indicating that tonight we're thinking in a little bit more detail about how the creation was created.

[3 : 30] And in particular, what that teaches us about God. So first of all, creation was created by God. That's one of the first things we learn in the Bible.

In fact, the opening words of the Bible tell us two things. They tell us that there was a beginning and they tell us that there is a creator. And that creator is identified as God.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. So we know that there was a beginning and we know that there was a creation. And the creator is God.

And these are actually crucial metaphysical claims. Because different worldviews will have different answers to that question. For a long, long, long time, people didn't think there was a beginning.

And maybe some people still think that. That the universe had existed forever. The Bible said something different. Interestingly, most scientists would absolutely agree with that now.

[4 : 29] And others, in terms of where did the universe come from? Not everybody thinks that it comes from God. But the Bible is making these metaphysical claims. And the rest of Scripture unpacks that in more detail.

The key point is that everything that is in existence owes that existence entirely to God.

He is our creator. And Scripture makes two important connections in regard to that creative action of God. Direct links are made to God's will and to God's wisdom.

God's will and God's wisdom are crucial for the Bible's metaphysic of creation. God's will. You see that in Revelation 4.11.

Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things. By your will they existed and were created. So what is the world the product of?

[5 : 35] It's the product of God's will. And indeed, that will of God lies at the heart of God's creative power. And this is where we see that there's a similarity and a difference between us and God.

So we have a will. There's things that we want. And God has a will. There's things that God wants. But there's a difference in the sense that our wills are limited.

Often there's things that we want that we can't accomplish or that can't happen or that don't happen. God's will is omnipotent. It has unlimited power.

So what God has willed in all eternity, that there would be a universe, has now become a created reality. And so the world and everything that exists owes its existence to the will of God.

And that has such an important point for every one of you. It's telling you that your existence is a willed existence. Now that's so important because other world views will tell you that your existence is a chance existence.

[6 : 47] Or a random existence. And maybe even a mistaken existence. Not the Bible.

The Bible tells you that your existence is a willed existence. And that means that according to the Bible's metaphysic, you can never, ever, ever say that you're a waste of space.

Or that you're useless or pointless. From all eternity, God has willed your existence. And that's why you exist today.

But alongside God's will, there's also God's wisdom. And that's why I wanted to read from Proverbs 8. Proverbs 8 is a fascinating chapter all about God's wisdom. This chapter personifies God's wisdom.

So it's talking about wisdom as though in the imagery of a person. And wisdom is actually talking about being there at the creation.

[7 : 53] I was there at the beginning of the earth. When the deeps were brought forth. When no deeps were brought forth. When there was no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped. Before the hills.

I was there. I was there. I was there. And it's making the connection that God's wisdom lies at the heart of God's creative acts. Now, the fascinating thing, we'll say a little bit more about this later on, is that later in the New Testament, later in the Bible, in the New Testament, the connection is made that the wisdom that's been spoken about here in Proverbs 8 actually finds its fulfillment and manifestation in Jesus Christ.

He is the wisdom of God. All of it just now, I want to highlight this just now to emphasize that there's this big, big emphasis on God's wisdom lying at the heart of creation.

And again, that counters any suggestion that the existence of the universe is impersonal or accidental or meaningless. It is the product of the majestic, unfathomable, glorious wisdom of God.

And creation abounds with evidence to prove it. And if you want to find that evidence, get yourself a telescope or a microscope. Telescope is going to tell you all sorts of astounding things about the universe.

[9 : 10] Microscope is going to tell you all sorts of astonishing detail about you and about the world around us and about the extraordinary detail of God's wisdom.

And so creation is the outworking of God's wisdom. And that means that the world around us is showing us more and more of God's perfections.

I want to give you a quote from a theologian called Herman Bavinck. He lived just over 100 years ago. He's from the Netherlands. The world is the product of his will. It's the revelation of his perfections and finds its goal in his glory.

And so every time you step outside, and it's amazing that I get to preach this sermon tonight because you can step outside tonight and you can go, wow, at the world around you. And that is every time you marvel at that creation is reason to marvel at the creator.

It's revealing the astonishing wisdom of God. Alongside that, that's when we say, you know, the creation is made by God. There's two Hebrew words that we need to think about in relation to that.

[10 : 25] We're saying creation is created by God. And I want to think a little bit about the Hebrew words that are used. First of all, in Genesis 1, you have the Hebrew word Elohim, which is a very common word in the Old Testament.

And that's a word that basically means mighty one. And that's speaking of the magnitude of God, the eternal being of God, the sovereign authority of God, the immutable independence of God, the almighty power and knowledge of God.

And so that's why he could be the creator, because he has all these astonishing attributes of power and wisdom and might and strength. Elohim, God, the mighty one, created the heavens and the earth.

So if you look at the world around you, and if you see mind-blowing levels of power and energy in the galaxies, or even in the world around us, no wonder. It's the mighty one who made it.

God. But there's another crucial name for God, another Hebrew word, and that's the word that often gets translated Lord in block capitals, and that's the Hebrew word Yahweh, which connects to Exodus 3 and 4 and the burning bush, and God coming to Moses saying, I am who I am.

[11 : 58] And this is a crucial name for God, because this is God's covenant name. That name Yahweh gets associated again and again in the Old Testament with God's covenant with his people.

And so that speaking, when you think of the word covenant, you're thinking about the deepest, closest, most committed relationship that we can have. So we're thinking of God's voluntary condescension to come and meet us, his willingness to enter a relationship with his creation, his openness to bestow his communicable attributes, the things that make us like him onto us.

And most importantly, that name, the Lord, Yahweh, speaks of his unrelenting covenant love towards the people that he's made to be his own.

And so when we say the creation is created by God, these two words should be in our mind. One of them is speaking to us of God's power. However, the other is speaking to us of God's love.

Every time you step outside, every time you look at that sun, every time you pick up the petal of a flower, every time you marvel at the creation around you, it is singing to you about God's power and about God's love.

[13 : 17] The creation was created by God. But the Bible teaches more than that. It teaches us that the creation was created by God, the Holy Trinity.

Creation is an aspect of what theologians call the external works of God. So we often, when theologians talk about God and the works of God, a distinction is drawn between the internal works of God, what God does within Father, Son, and Spirit, and the things that God then does outwardly in relation to things that aren't God, to things that have been created.

So there's the internal works of God, the external works of God. So creation falls into the external works of God, which makes sense, because creation is external to God. We learned that two weeks ago. There's a distinction between the creator and the creation.

The big point I want to highlight is when we talk about the works of God, whether they're internal works or external works, we always emphasize the fact that God's works are undivided.

In other words, there's a beautiful shared harmony in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the works of God. So when you think about God doing something, you mustn't think, oh, the Father's doing that, Son and the Spirit aren't involved.

[14 : 37] Spirit's doing that, Father and Son are way over there. No, there's an undividedness to God's works, and that applies to the Trinity. So what does that mean? Well, it means that the work of creation is the shared, undivided work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

It's a work that's done together, each functioning and making their own contribution to that. Each person of the Trinity participates in, contributes towards, and is glorified in the great work of creation.

And there's a beautiful hint of this in Genesis 1, where just before humanity is made, what does it say? God says, let us make. And I think that's pointing us towards this undivided work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So let's think about that a little bit more. I've got an interesting question for you. In the Bible, we talk about God as the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the Bible, who do we, of these specific persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who do we meet first?

Which specific person of the Trinity do we meet first in the Bible? Is it the Father, is it the Son, or is it the Spirit? It's the Spirit.

[15 : 56] Sorry, I should have moved my slide on. There's the letters make there. I was getting too excited. Here we are. Who do we meet first? We meet the Spirit of God. So yes, God is mentioned in verse 1, but specific person of the Trinity revealed is the Spirit.

And that's telling us that the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters, it's telling us that the Holy Spirit is involved in the work of creation. Now that actually shouldn't surprise us because later in Scripture, we will discover that when it comes to action, so here in Genesis 1, first of all, we are being introduced to the action of the creation being made.

It's later in Scripture that we learn about the decree of God, the wisdom of God, the purposing of God. Here we've got action. And when it comes to action, effect, movement, implementation of the works of God, that is primarily the work of God, the Holy Spirit.

So when we think of the Holy Spirit, it can be very, very hard to imagine the Holy Spirit, to think of the Holy Spirit. What should we think of? Well, one of the things that we can think of is even those words, hovering, moving, action.

And the Hebrew word for spirit is the same word for wind and for breath. All of that speaks of movement, action, energy. And the rest of the Bible makes the same connection between creation and the Holy Spirit.

[17 : 30] Psalm 104, when you send forth your spirit, they're created. It's the spirit who gives life, Jesus himself said. And so the accomplishment of God's creative will is achieved through the active, powerful, life-giving work of God, the Holy Spirit.

When you think of creation, think Holy Spirit. Creation is accomplished in the Spirit. But that's not all that the Bible reveals. The Bible also reveals that creation is the work of God, the Father.

That's actually revealed all through Scripture, so much so that a very famous document written, oh, in my mouth, 1700 years ago. In fact, maybe exactly 1700 years ago, 325, the Nicene Creed opens with the words, we believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And Scripture reinforces that. The passage we read at the start of our service says the same thing. God the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist.

In the external works of God, and indeed the internal works of God, the work of the Father is associated in the Bible with a preposition.

[18 : 50] It's associated with the concept from. So very often when talking about what God is doing, from will be attached to the Father.

and so creation is from the Father. The initiative proceeds from God the Father. There's a sense in which God is the administrator, the planner, the divisor of creation.

Creation is the accomplishment and application of the Father's plan. So, when you think about creation, you should be thinking about the Holy Spirit, but you should also be thinking about the Father.

So you have the activity of the Holy Spirit hovering over the waters. You have the will of the Father, the plan from the Father being accomplished, but that's not all.

The Nicene Creed and many of our theological instincts are going to immediately associate creation with the Father, and that's good and appropriate, but it's also crucial to note that Scripture, again and again, makes very, very strong connections between creation and God the Son.

[20 : 02] And here, the emphasis is not on from, the emphasis is on through. In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

So the Word there is referring to God the Son. He was in the beginning with God, all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.

And the same emphasis is repeated throughout Scripture. I'm running out of time as always, so you can see these references there. It's saying the same thing. And even 1 Corinthians 8 that made the connection between God the Father and creation also makes the connection with God the Son, one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

And in fact, the Nicene Creed recognized that as well. It said, we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God. Look at that word again. Through Him all things were made.

And as we said, what we read about in Proverbs 8, the wisdom associated with creation, that wisdom is actually identified as Christ Himself later in the New Testament.

[21 : 17] In other words, it's through the Son that the creative plan initiated by God is accomplished. And that's why Jesus can be called the firstborn of creation.

He can be called the beginning of God's creation. He can be called the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. So, to sum it all up, here's another quote from Mr. Bavinck.

First, there is the Father from whom the initiative for creation proceeds, who thinks the idea of the world. But all that the Father is and has and thinks He imparts to and expresses in the Son.

In Him, the Father contemplates the idea of the world itself, not as though it were identical with the Son, but so that He envisions and meets it in the Son in whom His fullness dwells. Contained in the divine wisdom as a part and in some lies also the wisdom that would be realized in the creatures to come.

He's the Logos by whom the Father creates all things. And it all gets summed up to say that creation proceeds from the Father through the Son in the Spirit.

[22 : 37] And that's a great wee sentence to memorize. I didn't make it up. I wish I had. That was Mr. Bavinck again. But creation comes from the Father through the Son in the Spirit.

Creation is the work of God the Holy Trinity. Each person sharing in and participating in and being glorified in this magnificent work of creation.

But that's not all the Bible teaches. The Bible also teaches that creation was created by the Word of God the Holy Trinity. When the Bible describes the act of creation the work of creation there is a repeated emphasis on the decisive role of the Word of God.

So we sang about that in Psalm 33. Let me see now did I put the right thing on the screen? There we are. We sang about it in Psalm 33.

By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made. By the breath of his mouth all their host. We sang about it in Psalm 148. Praise him you highest heavens and you the waters above the heavens.

[23 : 52] Let them praise the name of the Lord for he commanded and they were created. The New Testament says the same thing. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God and then Peter says the same thing created by the Word of God.

And of course this is the great emphasis of Genesis 1. And God said let there be light and there was light.

The mighty God the great King the covenant Lord speaks and his Word carries unparalleled authority power.

Now as we just unpack this I want to highlight three key emphases related to this. I want to talk about the manifestation of the attributes of God, the externalization of the works of God and I want to think about actualization through the speech of God.

Manifestation of the attributes of God, externalization of the works of God, actualization of the speech of God. You might be thinking Thomas what on earth are you talking about? I hope this will make sense and I hope it's going to be worth looking at.

[25 : 09] First of all the manifestation of the attributes of God. Basically the qualities that God has are being revealed and so the creative speech of God, what he says resonates with who he is, with his attributes.

So for example, God has a will and so his speech accomplishes his purposes. He decrees for there to be light, his speech implements that plan.

God is true and so his speech establishes and declares truth. So once God says let there be light, there's light. His word is now truth, it's always going to be truth, the physical reality of light becomes a fact.

God is powerful and so when he speaks, his power is instantly at work. So all the power and energy of light finds its origin in the speech of the all-powerful God.

And God is wise, he speaks and chaos is transformed into order through God's speech. Illumination comes, which of course applies much more than just at a physical level.

[26 : 20] So the attributes that God has are being manifested through his speech in his work of creation. There's also the externalization of the works of God.

So basically what we're trying to talk about here is how what God thinks and plans inwardly becomes a reality outwardly. So there's an externalization of the works of God.

So God planning and decreeing for there to be a world, that's an internal work, it's something he does, it's done internally, and then that is externalized as the creation is made.

And that externalization is emphasized by speech. Because what is speech? It's something coming from in here, that's going out, there's an externalization. So it's not that God thought the world into being and it came to be, no, he spoke and it was.

So there's this movement from internal to external. The internal decree of God to create leads to the external work of creation. And that verbalization of the work of God emphasizes that God is communicative from the very beginning.

[27 : 34] It's emphasizing the personal nature of the creator. And that stands in contrast to all the other world views that see the origin of the universe as an impersonal force or a blob or a singularity or a something.

The biblical metaphysic is that it's the origin of the universe, the absolute of reality, is a personal God, a personal God who speaks. And of course that has massive implications that are going to be unpacked later in scripture because what is language crucial for?

Language is crucial for the establishment of a relationship. We all have relationships with each other. Could any of us have those relationships if we did not communicate with each other, if we could not communicate in some form of language?

No, it's language, it's speech that creates relationships. Everything that we share as friends, as family, as a community is just a glimpse, a reflection of what God shares with us, the creator, with his creation.

And of course all of that's tied to the Bible's great theme, the theme of covenant, where language is used to create the most important relationships of all. So what's internal in God becomes external.

[28 : 50] It's through his speech. So you've got the manifestation of the attributes of God, the externalization of the works of God, then you have actualization through the speech of God. In other words, God's speech makes stuff happen.

Now the fancy term we use that is speech act theory. And when we talk about speech act theory, what we mean by that is that words can actually accomplish something.

There are contexts when words accomplish something. A great example is when I get to do a wedding. When I stand here and I have two people before me, when I say, I pronounce you husband and wife, my words have made something happen under God.

So the words accomplish action. And that is exactly what we see in God. What he has planned is actualized through the word of God.

God's speech is not merely descriptive. It is prescriptive. It is living and active. It makes stuff happen. So this is where it is so important to see that in Genesis 1, said comes before saw.

[30 : 05] So it is not like God saw this thing called light and thought, oh I think that should be called light. No, it is the other way around. God said, let there be light. And then he saw it. God's And so there is this logical movement from the internal work of God through the active speech of God to the realization, the actualization of what he wants to accomplish.

It is all reminding us that in it all God is utterly sovereign. But what I really want you to see is this. All three of these coalesce into one focal point.

The manifestation of the attributes of God, the externalization of the works of God, the actualization through the speech of God, all comes to one focal point.

All of it is channeled through Christ. He is the exact imprint of the nature of God.

So he's the one through whom all the attributes of God find their ultimate manifestation. He is the one, the image of the invisible God, the one in whom all the glorious works of God are revealed, the one through whom they're accomplished.

[31 : 32] And, well, what did John tell us about the speech of God? what did he tell us about Christ? He is the word. He is the one through whom God speaks, by whom God speaks.

He's the one through whom God's purposes are actualized. And so this is telling us that from the very beginning there's a connection between creation and communication and Christ.

There's a connection between creation and communication and Christ. Now, this is helping us to understand the metaphysics of the Bible. This is like I'm on my last eight lines.

Almost done. Almost done. This is helping us understand the metaphysics of the Bible. There's one word that sums it all up. When we think about this creative act of God, of creation by the word of God, the holy trinity, there's one word that sums it all up.

It's the word personal. We said a wee bit about this a moment ago, but I want to reinforce it again. All of this is telling us that God is personal.

[32 : 49] The creator is personal. The absolute of reality is personal. Not an impersonal force. Not a singularity of matter, gravity, and time, or whatever it may be.

Not a blob, not a force, not a something, not a whatever. He is the personal God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One God, three persons, and his actions are accomplished through his personal speech.

So that word is crucial for understanding who God is and what he's doing in creation. But the word personal is crucial for another reason. So this connection here between creation, communication, and Christ is vital for understanding original creation.

Way back in Genesis 1, to understand original creation, we need to think about communication, the word of God, and Christ because ultimately it's through him that that comes.

It's crucial for understanding original creation. It's also crucial for understanding the new creation which is the Bible's ultimate goal. The Bible begins with creation, it actually ends with creation as well.

[34 : 04] So Genesis 1 and 2, original creation. Revelation 21 and 22, the new creation. And creation, communication, and Christ, these connections are vital for understanding that as well.

So the Bible begins with original creation, it ends with a new creation. There's one crucial difference between the two. What is that difference between what the Bible says about original creation and new creation?

What is the difference? you. You're not mentioned in Genesis 1 and 2.

Yes, you're planned, absolutely, but the focus is not on you there. But in the new creation, Jesus the Lamb has a book of life.

And if you're trusting in Jesus, your name is in it. And it's all telling us that God's great plan from the original creation led on and is leading on to the new creation and Jesus wants you there.

[35 : 38] to And the Bible is going to reveal to us how Jesus came and died and rose again to undo all the sin that has separated you from God.

But what I want you to think about is this. When we think about the new creation, when we think about the fact that Jesus wants you there, what is Christ doing right now so that you can be part of the new creation?

What is Christ doing right now so that you can be part of the new creation? He's doing what he did when he made the old creation.

He's speaking. speaking. He's speaking to you. And the all-powerful, life-giving, universe-creating voice of God is not calling the heavens and the earth and the sun and the moon and the stars into existence anymore.

He's calling you into his arms. He's whispering your name. He's telling you to come home.

[37 : 11] And it does not matter if you don't really understand half of what I've been going on about tonight. All that matters is that you can hear that Jesus is calling you because he loves you so much.

Amen. Let's put it in. Let's put it in.!