

00:04 And welcome back. This is the fourth and final video for the first session of Exploring, the Exploring Theology course, where we're looking at the question, Who is God?

00:13 And we left off last time, we were doing our, summary of God's story, what, we were mapping out the bare bones of the story, the plot line, as it were, of how we would tell, God's story.

00:24 And then we, then I asked you to, have a go at writing a single sentence summary, and we just briefly touched on some of the, sort of, well, different ways we might go with that, and some of the complexities that then arise.

00:37 and we'll be sharing those stories, those single sentence summaries when we gather together. and I left off the last session saying that I was going to introduce you to a single sentence summary, by a theologian called Robert Jensen, so let me introduce you to Robert Jensen.

00:57 here we go. Here's Robert Jensen, he's got a beard, so he must be, so he's gotta be a good theologian, I'm joking, obviously, beards are not a prerequisite to being a theologian, but yeah, so he, he was a 20th century theologian, he was from North America, he was a

01:16 Lutheran, one of the, a member of the Lutheran denomination, and, yeah, so, he's, he's he was a very sharp thinker, and, excuse me, slug of tea, ok, so here we go, so this is the sentence, so he wrote this two-volume, theological work, and in it is a sentence which has become

01:39 quite famous, so here we go, here's the sentence, It goes like this, God loves you. God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt.

01:50 This is his single sentence summary of the story of God. God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt.

02:05 So I just want to spend a few moments unpacking this sentence, and, drawing your attention to why I think it's a, a really good sentence.

02:14 It's a good bit of theology, and it helps us, grapple with this question of who is God, the identity of God.

02:24 so let's get going with that. Now, first off is to draw your attention to just that, whoever, God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt.

02:36 The whoever is critical here because implicit in that is that, Jensen is understanding that, well, when we talk about God, who are we talking about?

02:45 We could be talking about any number of understandings of God. We have to, we have to be specific. We have to talk about God's identity.

02:52 and that's especially true in our time and our age, but also down the ages, there have been so many different understandings of who God is.

03:02 so, the whoever is like a hinge here. It's recognizing that if we're going to talk about God, there's a, there's a question of identity.

03:12 We have to be specific. We can't just say God. And you know, you, you all have heard many people say this and everything.

03:19 And, one of the things is, you know, I, I didn't have, personally, I didn't have anything to do with the church until my mid late twenties.

03:26 And, you know, and, you know, like many people of my age, it would be like, yeah, I don't believe in God, God's nonsense on and so forth, blah, blah, blah.

03:32 And, and then, you know, becoming a Christian and becoming, coming to faith and everything, then hearing other people say that kind of thing and thinking, well, hang on a second, the God you're describing is God.

03:44 Isn't the God I believe in either? the kind of qualities and characteristics and just simply the identity of the story that you're telling is, it just, you know, it's, it's, that isn't the God I believe in.

03:55 so we can come to this with all sorts of different ways of telling the story and different identities of the God we're talking about.

04:03 So there's a question of who, who are we talking about? So here, Jensen acknowledges that by saying, God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead having before raised Israel from Egypt.

04:13 Okay, so that's the first point I want to draw your attention to. Second point, so there's the sentence as a whole.

04:17 God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead having before raised Israel from Egypt. As you can tell, my intention is that you will learn the sentence and you'll just have it there because it's, it's, it's, it's really very good.

04:31 Sorry, I'm biased. and I'll see I, I, I, I, yeah. Stop butchering, will ya? Okay, uhh, what was the next thing I wanted to draw your attention to?

04:40 Okay, so, uhh, yeah, uhh, five things as it tries to uhh, address this question of whoever. Okay, this question of identity, who is God?

04:52 Five things. So, first of all, it mentions uhh, uhh, umm, characters, as it were. Umm, so, it mentions God, Jesus, Israel, and Egypt.

05:09 That's God, Jesus, Israel, and Egypt. Umm, so, it's, so, it's mentioning, how many times is William going to- Say this.

05:21 So, there's God, yes. Then it's talking about a human being, Jesus. Now, obviously, it-it might be that you're saying, okay, well, is Jesus more than a human being and so on?

05:33 And yes, obviously we're going to be wrestling with that as part of what follows on this course. Umm, and then there's a group of people, a nation, Israel, and there's a pl- race, Egypt, so you've got a god, a human being, Jesus, a specific human being, and then a nation, a people, and Egypt and then

06:05 it's okay I said at some

06:08 Well, I apologize for the interruption there, because what happened was that Bart, here's Bart, come on Bart, Bart decided to come and step on my keyboard.

06:19 And so, I was mid-flow and then, Bart, here we go, here's Bart. This is one of our, our cats.

06:27 he's he's a rescue. He's, 16, coming up to 16 years old. And, yes, this is how theologically geeky and nerdy I am.

06:37 He is named after Karl Barth, who was a Swiss theologian in the 20th century. he's not named after Bart Simpson, as the vets think.

06:46 he's named after Karl Barth. And, Karl Barth was a very, significant Protestant theologian in the 20th century.

06:56 He was one of the significant, signatories and of writers of the Barman Declaration, which is when he and people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer were, standing up to the, Nazis in Germany and calling the German church to account for how it was colluding, with the Nazis in the 1930s. So

07:15 anyway, this is Barth and hopefully Barth isn't going to interrupt the recording anymore. I told you he'd make an appearance at some point, and he has just at this precise moment.

07:24 So anyway, on we go, back to the slides. there we go. Sorry about that. Anyway, this way you've met Bart.

07:33 He will make an appearance on the online sessions as well, I'm sure. so right. Where was I? Talking about all these different elements.

07:42 God, Jesus, Israel, Egypt. So, talking about God, his whoever, and then we move on. So there's a human being involved, there's, a bird, people, Israel, and there's a place, Egypt.

07:55 And it's not just, talking about it in those kind of ways, it's also recognising that there's this raised from the dead, there's something that's happened, which is obviously very particular and very, strange and weird, raised from the dead, and this is then connected, you know what I was

08:16 talking about a moment ago, about saying you've got to make sure that you're connecting, when you're doing this one sentence summary of God's story, and you don't want it just to be the New Testament, that's like the raised Jesus from the dead bit, but you also want to encompass the Old Testament, and

08:31 that raising bit is connected with Jesus being raised from the dead, with the raised Israel from the dead. So it's both those two aspects.

08:40 are connected there. You've got the Old Testament with raised Israel from the dead raised Israel from Egypt. Now, you might think, hang on, what are you talking about there?

08:49 Raised Israel from Egypt? He's talking about the Exodus there, when the people of God were freed from slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt, through

the waters of the Red Sea, into the, well, not straight into the Promised Land, was it? Then they were into the wilderness, but they were raised.

09:07 Jensen here is talking of that happening with, Israel out of Egypt as a form of resurrection, as a form of Exodus, in Luke, when when you have the, a transfiguration.

09:25 The word that's used there when when Jesus is revealed to be there talking with Moses and Elijah, they are talking about Jesus's departure that he was going to effect at Jerusalem, and the word that Luke uses there is Exodus.

09:41 There's this connection between the resurrection of Jesus and the raising, the raising of Jesus from the dead and the raising of Egypt raising of Israel.

09:52 from Egypt, and Jensen is making that connection, by using the same language in a sort of parallel structure here.

09:59 So God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead having before raised Israel from Egypt. And notice, what am I saying next?

10:07 Yes, before. There's a time, there's a temporal aspect here, so we're not talking just about a specific human being, we're not just talking about something having happened, we're not just talking about a people, we're not talking just about a place, when we're talking about who God is, we're also talking

10:22 about this temporal aspect, that Jesus being raised from the dead, well, before that, God raised Israel from Egypt, so there's a temporal aspect when we're talking about God's, the story of God.

10:37 So we've got all those aspects there, and, and, we're yes, just to make the point, that when we talk about it being Jesus from the dead, there were lots of people called Jesus in that first century, in in Palestine.

10:52 So it was, it wasn't just that, it wasn't just that, well, there's only one Jesus in town type of thing.

10:58 No, there were lots of Jesus's. So which Jesus are we talking about there? Well, we're talking about the one that God raised from the dead.

11:04 And it's also, you know, um it's almost an aside, but not quite an aside. But it matters that it's, the identity of God is related to which Jesus we're talking about, which human being we're talking about.

11:19 Because raising somebody from the dead isn't necessarily good news. Jensen makes this point in various bits of his writing saying that, you know, if we were to say that God raised Stalin- We balance. From the dead.

11:29 Or God raised Hitler from the dead. That's distinctly bad news. Whereas God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead is good news.

11:37 But it matters who that Jesus is. So suddenly you're pitched into, well, who was this Jesus? And what was he like?

11:43 And so on and so forth. So it suddenly becomes a springboard for thinking about who Jesus is. To make sense of who God is.

11:52 Okay, so the key thing here to take away at this point, from this single sentence summary, is that if we're to speak of who God is, then the way, and do so using scripture as our, our authority, we are necessarily going to talk about people.

12:13 We're going to talk about things happening. We're going to talk about places. We're going to talk about time passing. All this is necessary, if we are to identify who God is.

12:25 And as soon as we start talking about things like specific people, places, nations, temporal events, events happening, like, yes, this is a very particular event raised from the dead and- raised from Egypt, these particular events, if we're going to be talking about all these kind of things, people, 12:46 places, events, temporal sequences, so on and so forth, what we're talking about the stuff of our lives. This is where we live.

12:53 We are specific people. We live in specific places. We- things happen to us and they happen to us in a sequence and we are in that same sequence just further down the line.

13:04 You know, before we're after the raising Jesus from the dead bit, we're after the raising Jesus from the dead bit, which was after the raising Israel from Egypt bit.

13:14 We live downstream from that. So we're implicitly tied up with and involved in this story. So, there's a lot going on here.

13:24 There's more to say, but I think that's probably enough for now. so, uh. Where am I going with this now?

13:31 Yeah, I've talked about that. Interesting thing to say. Okay. So, obviously with all of this, story is really important. This is a single sentence attempt by Jensen to encapsulate the story of God in just a few words.

13:48 And suddenly you see all these things are involved there. So story is really- really important. But then, as I say, we're kind of involved in it.

13:56 We're implicitly there because this is the stuff of our lives, places, people, identities, events, and so on and so forth.

14:01 But what about our story? What about the events, the people, the places of our story? And how does our story connect with God's story?

14:16 Are they totally- Umm, separate entities? Or are they connected in some way? Go back to that sentence there, with God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt.

14:29 Jensen is saying, if we're to say who God is, we need to talk about all the stuff of our world, our existence, our, our, you know, we can't speak of God in other terms, type of thing, is the- second.

14:41 The- the part of the claim that Jensen is making here, so how does our story connect with God's story? God has God's story?



14:47 And we have our story. How do those stories connect? Umm, in other words, yes, so how does our identity?

14:58 Because remember, when we've been talking about God's story, we've been talking about God's story with a view to understanding who is God.

15:05 You How does our identity relate to God's identity? So we're talking about story. If we get to use story, and story is one of the key ways that we weave all these little- elements of what might identify us together into a cohesive whole which gives coherence and, uhh, uhh, uhh, durability in terms of

15:25 , you know, it's not just your identity was this at one point. Our identity continues over time. So story helps us narrate and pull these elements of us- of our- of- how we narrate our lives gives us this, identity over time- how does our identity relate to God's identity?

15:45 Jensen there was very much bringing those together. God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead having before raised Israel from Egypt.

15:53 It's the story of events happening in our, as it were, space time continuum- are integral to identifying who God is, but how does- is our identity relate to God's identity?

16:07 How do these two stories relate to one another? And so in that sense, the question then becomes, who are we?

16:18 And that is going to be the question for our second session in exploring theology.

16:30 yes, that's our question for next time. Who are we? well done! you've, you've made it. This is now we're coming to the end of the our first session, the preparatory materials for the first session.

16:43 so I just want to summarize now, as it were, the ground that we've covered, because we've covered quite a bit.

16:53 started by looking at some definitions of theology. If you recall, we, we had a definition from Alistair McGrath and one from Beth Felker-Jones, and we'll come up with other I'll give you some other definitions of theology as we go along.

17:09 And then, having done that, we looked at we explored what came to mind when we thought about the question, who is God?

17:19 And we looked at various images as well as we did that, and I asked you what images came to mind, I showed you some images, we also talked about, what, emotions, what feelings were stirred when we, think about God.

17:34 And then we carried on, we explored what, shaped our answers. We had all sorts of different answers, and, what, what, what shaped them.

17:43 And then I introduced you to this understanding that, the, the approach that we take for doing our kind of theological thinking, our theological

reflecting, drawing on primarily the source of scripture, but also tradition and reason, and, then more latterly with, John Wesley

18:01 introduced this, category of experience, and, this as being, essential to it. And then in the last century, the understanding of worship being very important, in terms of a source that shapes our understanding of, our theological reflections when we're asking and tackling

18:19 questions of such enormity as who is God. Then we pivoted with that, and we went, as it were, back to the original and overarching question for this video.

18:28 The first session, who is God, and we were then talking about issues, too, of identity. how do we know someone's identity?

18:37 We looked at different ways that we can do that, and since recording this over the course of today that my passport has arrived, so I've got that now.

18:46 But to what degree, does something like, simple like a passport actually tell You who I am, it's a fairly thin understanding, whereas when we tell a story, it becomes a richer, we, we draw together all these different elements and we craft them into a narrative, into a story, which gives a much 19:05 , richer understanding, a much thicker understanding of who we are, of our identity. So, we were recognising the importance of story, and then we mapped that out.

19:16 On to talking about God's story, and I asked you to do a couple of exercises, one which was to look at the overarching, as it were, story of God, how would you tell that story in terms of its basic plot elements, and, and then after that we looked at, we had a go at doing a single sentence,

19:37 summary of that story, which was quite tricky. And then I introduced you to the theologian, Robert Jensen, and his single sentence summary of talking about the story of God identifying God.

19:52 God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt. And we looked at what was involved, some of what was involved in that sentence, and we saw how, to speak of God's identity, in, was very intimately involved in talking about our identity, and that's where we got to 20:11 in terms of looking ahead to, so what's the connection between our identity and God's identity? What's the connection between our story and God's story?

20:18 And that's where we're going to, carry on next time when we're looking at the question, who are we?

20:26 Okay, now I just want to spend a moment talking about the story the additional the the recommended and optional resources for this first session.

20:36 we go, okay, well done, you've made it to the end of the first the preparatory materials, the tutor- preparatory tutorial materials, for session one of the Exploring Theology course, Who is God?

20:50 As I said in the introductory video, there are also optional recommended and optional resources, for example, I think in the recommended there's, a, an interview between Paula Gooder and Rowan Williams, talking about what is theology, and likewise in the optional resources there's a similar

21:08 kind of interview with, Alistair McGrath, so, and there will be other resources as well to listen to or to read and, and that kind of thing, so, engage with those as you have time, bring some of what you've already covered, what you've learned in this video, first session, when you're

21:24 listening to them talk about their various approaches listen to some of it and the way it connects with what we've been talking about in this in these, this guided reflection, in the preparatory materials that you've been doing with me here, and, but, trust me, I just want to reiterate

21:41 this, you don't need to do all the materials. Okay, the recommended is, if you have time in your life, are able to, brilliant, go for it, and the optional ones are kind of like, well, if you really, really have lots of, you know, time, then, by all means, have a look at those, but, there's no expectation

21:57 for you to have covered all of those or anything like that, it's really just to the degree that it's of interest for you and it piques your curiosity, and it may be that when we come to discuss these things in in person, we'll for our first session, you'll hear somebody say something about

22:14 one of the resources and you go like, oh, actually, yeah, I'll check that out, so you can come to them at any point type of thing.

22:20 So there we go, yeah, that's brilliant, I just want to draw this close this first session together by a prayer together, and, and then we're done.

22:32 So, there we go, over to the prayer then.

22:35 yes, before we get to the prayer, I just wanted to, just add a little thing, just to, just to remind you that for this first session, and for all the sessions, please do bring your notebooks, that you've been writing down your various thoughts and reflections and so on and so forth.

22:48 And in between these sessions, as you are pondering and reflecting, just use the same notebook, just to, just put things down, so that you've got them there for reference, then bring them along, and then we can share, what and when we're discussing together, both in person and then for the following sessions online. There we go, right, now it is time for prayer.

23:11 yeah, this is the prayer with which we began our session, and I'm just including just the I've just tweaked the wording as you can see, just in italics there.

23:22 But before we pray, I just want to say a big thank you. Thank you for engaging with the material so far, I hope you found it helpful, and I look forward to, seeing you in person when we gather for our first session.



23:33 Okay, let's take a moment, and then we will pray together, and I this final prayer, I encourage you to say it with me, as, as I say Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding.

23:55 Continue to pour into the hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire.

24:12 Through Jesus Christ, our Amen. There we go. Thanks very much everybody. See you soon. Bye now.