

Experiencing the Trinity

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- [0 : 0 0] When I was a college student at the University of Maryland, there was a student club on campus. This particular student club did improv comedy.
- Once a year, usually in the month of May, they would do a 24-hour performance of improv comedy in the center of campus.
- You would be walking back from class in the middle of the day, or you would be coming back late at night from a friend's dorm, and you would see students in the center of campus doing an improv comedy show, whether their audience was 100 people or zero people.
- Improv comedy is, of course, improvisational. It's all made up on the spot. Often performers take ideas or words from the audience, and they turn it into a scene.
- And to do this, you have to not only be funny, but you have to be pretty smart and quick on your feet. And so it was pretty incredible that this group of students would do this for 24 hours straight.
- [1 : 0 7] And if you know anything, if you've heard anything about how people learn to do improv comedy, you know that one of the core principles is yes and.
- Yes and. It's this dynamic where performers are to build upon each other's performances. So one person walks out on the stage and starts doing something.
- Maybe they're reading a book or driving a car. And the second person's job is to walk out onto the stage and say yes and. To accept what the person is doing and to accept it and turn it into something that's creative and funny.
- As we've already said, today in the church calendar is Trinity Sunday. And if I could summarize what Trinity Sunday is all about, it's yes and.
- Yes and. God is one. Yes and. And he is also three. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- [2 : 1 3] God is three. Yes and. He is also one. And so that's what we're going to look at this morning. We're going to, from our gospel passage, from John chapter 16, we're going to look at the Trinity.
- We're going to look at understanding the Trinity and experiencing the Trinity. Understanding the Trinity and experiencing the Trinity. So first of all, understanding the Trinity. Even though the word Trinity is never used in Scripture, this is nonetheless how God has revealed himself in Scripture.
- As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now it took the church several generations to describe exactly how this is the case, especially in terms of the identity of the Son, who is both human and divine.
- How is that possible? Well, that took several centuries for the church to unpack. But after reflecting on Scripture for centuries through councils like Nicaea and Chalcedon and Constantinople, the church landed on this yes and way of describing God.
- That God is a tri-unity of one essence, one nature, one substance, three persons.

[3 : 31] So the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not three separate gods. They're not three equal parts of God where each person of the Trinity is .33333 God.

I debated on how many threes to use because you can keep going. Nor are they three modes of being where sometimes God acts like a father, sometimes God acts like the Son, or sometimes God acts like the Spirit.

That's a heresy called modalism. Or my personal favorite heresy, Sibelianism. Sibelianism is taught by a man named Sibelius, who lived in the third century.

And my favorite heresy is what he taught, which is that in the Old Testament, God acted like the Father. In the New Testament, God acted like the Son. And in the church age, our present age, God acts like the Spirit.

Now, we give Sibelius lots of points for creativity. But we give him zero points for orthodoxy. Listen to how the 39 Articles of Religion, this is our Anglican confessional statement, reflects on the orthodox and apostolic definition of the early church councils.

[4 : 52] The 39 Articles put it like this. There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible.

There's the oneness. And now here's the yes and. And in the unity of this Godhead, there are three persons of one substance, power, and eternity.

That's the threeness. The Westminster Confession of Faith, the document similar to the 39 Articles, puts it like this. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are same in substance, equal in power and glory.

Same in substance, equal in power and glory. One God, one nature, one essence, three persons. And you might say, well, Jeff, that's a nice theology lesson, but what actual difference does that make in my life?

In his book, How to Know a Person, New York Times author David Brooks talks about his personal story, and he talks about how he grew up in a family, in an educational culture that was very heady, that was very intellectual, very cerebral, perhaps overly so.

[6 : 13] He talks about how he attended undergrad at the University of Chicago as a young man. And he talks about the University of Chicago as that it's the kind of place where students wear T-shirts that say, sure, it works in practice, but does it work in theory?

And I think oftentimes when people hear pastors like me talk about God being a Trinity, sometimes that's the vibe. It's this kind of like overly theoretical thing that's distanced from my real life.

What difference does it make? But talking about the Trinity is not an overly theoretical exercise. It's intensely practical. Because the yes and of the Trinity is all about love.

It's all about love. Some religions, like Islam, teach that God is unitarian, one nature, one person. But if that's true, if God is one person, we have to ask, before the creation of the world, who was God loving?

For there to be love, there has to be a plurality of personhood. There is the lover and there is the beloved. And for a Unitarian God to love, he must create another person in order to love.

[7 : 36] And so for a Unitarian God, power, not love, is what is most central to his being. But if God is a Trinity, then love is essential to who he is from all of eternity.

God does not create in order to love. God creates because he is love. He creates as an overflow of the love that is central to his being.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit exist in a mutually indwelling, mutually glorifying, eternal dance of divine love.

From all of eternity, the Father has loved and glorified the Son. And the Son has loved and glorified the Father. And they love and glorify one another through the Spirit. The whole purpose of creation, the whole purpose of redemption, the whole purpose of existence is to bring you and I to catch us up into this eternal dance of love.

That we might experience the mutually indwelling, the mutually glorifying love of the Trinity. This is the reason for all that exists.

[8 : 50] This is the reason why you and I exist. And all of this is important to understand what is going on in our gospel passage in John chapter 16 and what's going on in John chapters 13 through 17 more broadly.

Where our understanding of the Trinity intersects with our experience of the Trinity. And that's what we're going to look at secondly. Our experience of the Trinity.

Experiencing the Trinity. If you read the Gospel of John, you'll notice that John chapters 13 through 17 are kind of a cohesive unit. They're known as the upper room discourse.

They're actually all one scene. They're not individual discourses. They're all one scene on the night before Jesus is arrested and betrayed. Where he gathers with his disciples in the upper room to eat the Passover meal.

And he gathers to eat with them one last time. To fellowship with them. And to teach them. And these five chapters are amazing. You could spend a lifetime studying these five chapters.

[9 : 56] They're incredibly rich. And a lot of it is this deep theological teaching from Jesus to his disciples on the nature and work of the Trinity.

And across chapters 13 through 17, Jesus teaches us a lot about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But here in our Gospel passage, in the first half of John chapter 16, he zooms in.

He zooms in on the work of the Holy Spirit. In this scene, Jesus is telling his disciples that he is soon going to leave them. After his death and resurrection, he's going to return back to the Father in his ascension.

And in verses 5 through 6, he acknowledges that his disciples are grieved about this. They don't want him to leave. And this is understandable, right? I mean, they've been with him the past several years.

They've grown close to him. Of course, they wouldn't want him to leave. But in verse 7, Jesus says something incredibly surprising. If you look in your bulletin or in your copy of God's Word, notice what Jesus says in verse 7.

[11 : 02] He says, It is to your advantage. It's to your advantage that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

And you can imagine kind of the disciples' surprise as they hear this. I mean, you can imagine them saying, What do you mean? What do you mean it's to our advantage that you go away?

Wouldn't it be so much better if you stuck around? I mean, we could just keep this party going. We could keep doing all the amazing stuff that we've seen you do the past few years. You could do your thing.

You could teach people, heal people, raise the dead, change lives. And we'll keep hanging out with you and drawing the crowds. You know? Take this show on tour throughout the Roman Empire.

What do you mean it's better? What do you mean it's better that you leave? Jesus says, No, it's for your benefit that I go and ascend to the Father so I can send the Holy Spirit.

[12 : 01] There is something about the work of the Holy Spirit. That it is better for the Holy Spirit to be in us than physically beside us.

There is something about the work of the Holy Spirit. It's better for the Holy Spirit to be in us than physically beside us. But how could that be? I mean, if I think about my own life, I could think about a hundred situations where it would be so helpful.

It would be so helpful to have Jesus physically right beside me. I mean, some of you can probably think about situations or circumstances in your own life. Where it would be so helpful to have Jesus right there with you.

Perhaps in dealing with sickness or pain. Perhaps dealing with frustrations at work. Perhaps even applying for a job. Perhaps walking through grief or loss.

I mean, isn't this Martha and Mary's question to Jesus when their brother Lazarus dies? Lord, if you had been here. Right?

[13 : 03] Lord, if you had been here. So then why is the Holy Spirit in us better than Jesus beside us? Well, there's a lot that we could say about that. The Bible has a lot to say about the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

There are lots of different ways that we could answer that question. But what does Jesus specifically focus on in the rest of our passage? What does he specifically say in verses 8 through 15?

In verses 8 through 15, Jesus says, It's to our advantage that he returns to the Father and sends the Spirit. Because of the Spirit work of illumination.

Illumination. Illumination is this theological word that means that the Holy Spirit does two things. The Holy Spirit shows us our need for Jesus.

And it shows us all that we have in Jesus. Shows us all that we need. Shows us that we need Jesus. And shows us all that we have in Jesus. And this is what we see as we read the rest of the passages.

[14 : 02] Verses 8 through 15. Verse 8. And when he, that is the Holy Spirit, When he comes, He will convict the world Concerning sin And righteousness And judgment.

The Holy Spirit has to do this because on our own, We can't know that we are sinners who need a Savior. Despite our intellect and our reason, Our fallen nature can't quite comprehend this reality.

We need the Holy Spirit To enlighten and to illumine our hearts to this reality. To convict us of our sin And to show us our need for righteousness.

To show us our need for a Savior. But the Holy Spirit not only shows us Our need for Jesus. The Holy Spirit also shows us All that we have in Jesus.

He shows us all that we have in Jesus. This is what Jesus teaches in verse 14. He, the Holy Spirit, Will glorify me. That's Jesus.

[15 : 05] He will glorify me For he will take what is mine And declare it to you. He will take what is mine And declare it to you.

What is the job of the Holy Spirit? The job of the Holy Spirit Is to glorify Jesus By taking what belongs to him And sharing it with us.

And sharing it with us. And as the Holy Spirit Shows us the glory of Jesus And shares with us All that belongs to Jesus, We also see the glory of the Father.

That's what comes next in verse 15. Verse 15 says All that the Father has is mine And therefore I said That he will take what is mine And declare it to you.

The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit Catches us up into the life of the Trinity. This is the way the Apostle Paul The Apostle Paul says it like this In 2 Corinthians 4 verse 6 For God who said Let light shine out of darkness That's a reference to creation In Genesis 1 For God who said Let light shine out of darkness Made his light shine in our hearts To give us And the Spirit is like this giant spotlight

[16 : 56] This giant spotlight That shines on Jesus To help us to see him In all of his beauty And all of his glory.

Not just so that we understand Not just so that we have right thinking But so that we love him And worship him And adore him And obey him.

And so that we experience His love for us. That's what Paul says In Romans 5. Romans 5 verse 5 Says this That God's love God's love Has been poured out Into our hearts Through what?

Through who? Through the Holy Spirit. God pours out his love Into our hearts Through the Holy Spirit. Theologians across church history Have reflected On the illuminating work Of the Holy Spirit As having both light And heat.

Light and heat. Through the light of the Holy Spirit We see who Jesus is. All that he has accomplished for us. And through the heat Through the heat of the Holy Spirit We feel and experience The love of Christ for us.

[18 : 16] So listen to Jonathan Edwards Say it like this. I've edited this quote To make it a bit clearer. Listen to Jonathan Edwards Say it like this. As flowers on a pleasant spring day As flowers on a pleasant spring day Open up to the sun To be filled with its warmth and light And to flourish in beauty And fragrance by its rays.

So every Christian Is a flower in the garden of God. Opening up our hearts To be filled with God's love Through the Spirit.

It's a beautiful image. Listen to how Charles Spurgeon Charles Spurgeon says it like this. It is ever the Holy Spirit's work. I love this.

It is ever the Holy Spirit's work To turn our eyes away from self And toward Jesus. We shall never find happiness By looking at our own prayers Our own doings Our own feelings.

It is what Jesus is. Not what we are. That brings rest to our souls. It is what Jesus is.

[19 : 38] Not what we are. That brings rest to our souls. Okay, can we just hang out there for a second? Because I think that we live In a culture That places a huge emphasis On self-improvement And self-optimization.

If you're not happy with who you are Or where you're at in life Then you need to work on Optimizing your life And you can find All sorts of books And podcasts And YouTube videos And social media posts About how to optimize your diet How to optimize your Your workout routines Your schedule Your fashion How you clean your house How you organize your closet How to swing a golf club That last one was purely theoretical Just One No, that last one was me Now The self-optimization Now all of this is bad Some of it can be helpful But how often Do we look to self-optimization And self-improvement As the thing That is going to bring rest to our souls?

I think whether we say it out loud or not I think that This often looks like statements That begin with If I could just If I could just Get this one thing in my life Figured out or organized If I could just Lose this much weight If I could just Figure out the Perfect schedule for all my kids If I could just Wake up Do a cold plunge Brew the perfect coffee Do the right exercise routine Write out my goals for the day All before 6am If I could just do that Then my life would be Better Then I would finally be at rest Or as Christians We over-spiritualize Self-optimization If I could just Get my spiritual disciplines in order Or if I could just Pray enough Or just kind of Find the right devotional practice But how many of us Have Tried to optimize These parts of our lives Maybe we've tried and failed

Or maybe we've even succeeded But how many of us Have done this And realized That That's not it That's not it That it doesn't Actually bring The deep rest To our souls That we long for May I suggest To you From John chapter 16 That this is because Transformation Transformation Doesn't happen Through self-optimization Transformation Doesn't happen By shining the spotlight More on ourselves Transformation Happens By shining the spotlight More on the beauty And the glory Of Jesus It is what Jesus is Not what we are That brings rest To our soul What our hearts Most need Is not To optimize Or improve ourselves But to behold The beauty And the glory Of God In the face Of Jesus Christ And I think

That's what John Jesus in John chapter 16 Is saying That this is What the Holy Spirit Does That he takes What belongs To Jesus And he shows it To us And he shares it With us And this is why The Trinity Is so amazing This is why The Trinity Is so incredible This is why The Holy Spirit In us Is even better Than Jesus Beside us It is because Jesus ascends Because Jesus ascends And goes back To the glory Of the Father It is because He does that That he can share All that belongs To him With us All the benefits Of his saving work All that he has In the Father He shares that With us By pouring Out his Spirit On us And I think That this is Ultimately Why Improv comedy

[23 : 54] Ultimately Points us to God Because the Trinity Is the ultimate Yes And Performance The eternal Life and love Of God Overflows into Our lives By catching us Up into this Dance Of Father Son And Holy Spirit Who mutually Indwell And mutually Glorify one another In an eternal Dance Of love And the difference That this makes In our lives Is that we are Fundamentally Not Self Optimizers We are not Fundamentally Self Improvers But we are Glory Gazers We are Glory Gazers What is it What is it About the beauty And the glory Of Jesus That your heart

Needs to gaze At this morning What aspect Of his Nature What aspect Of his Character What aspect Of his Finished work Does your heart Need to gaze At and to Behold This morning Through the Illuminating Work of the Holy Spirit Perhaps Perhaps It's his Love For you As your Bridegroom Perhaps It's his Forgiveness And mercy For you As your Savior Perhaps It's his Justice And authority As your King Perhaps It's his Tenderness For you As your Shepherd It is

Who Jesus Is Not What We Are That Brings Rest To Our Souls Let me Close With the Words From this Wonderful Hymn Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus Look Full In his Wonderful Face And the Things Of the Earth Will Grow Strangely Dim In the Light Of his Glory And grace Pray with Me Father Son And Holy Spirits We Worship You And adore You Thank you That you Have Invited Us Into Your Mutually Indwelling Mutually Glorifying Dance Of Love Thank you That because Of Jesus You send Your spirit

To illuminate Our hearts And to Illuminate Jesus Your glory Help us To gaze Upon you And behold You And be Transformed To be More like You And we Pray all This in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit Amen Yes