

The trinity

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Date: 15 September 2024

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[0:00] It's really simple and straightforward, which it isn't of course, it's remarkably deep.! We're going to look at it for the next 40 minutes or so let's ask for help. I'm going to ask you to be on! on your tiptoes and we're going to be thinking, working through the scriptures together. So let's pray that the Lord would help us. Please will you show us, Lord, your glory. We are far too much preoccupied by this world and the things around us, even our own senses and emotions and we pray that you will enable us to lift our eyes to the things as yet unseen and become worshippers and followers and servants of the triune God. So help the speaker and help us as hearers in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen. Now do all religions worship the same God?

I think most people in Brighton would probably say yes. They're all much the same, aren't they? All religions pretty much the same. Judaism and Islam and Hinduism, you call them all faiths and people in Brighton would probably say I don't care for any of them but what I do know they're all pretty much the same. And are all versions of Christianity the same? Everything that calls itself Christianity, Christianity. Is that all, are they all pretty much the same? There was, no, well that is the correct answer. Back in, I didn't look up the date, I can't remember it, a guy called Arius said, well you can have versions of Christianity where Jesus is not the Son of God, He is a created being, He had a beginning and if you think of, if you divide the world into two, the creator and the created, you put Jesus in the created part of it. And Jehovah's Witnesses do the same thing and to the best of my knowledge Mormons do the same thing. Does that matter? I mean Jesus is there isn't he? But does it matter whether you think of him as being creator or created? And this matter of Trinity, if you've got a sort of sceptical background, you'll say aha, that word is not in the Bible. And of course that is true. The word is nowhere in the Bible but is the idea there? Well even in the passage that we read I like to say yeah, absolutely the idea is there.

And you might be thinking, well we're going to have a sermon on the Trinity. Does it make any real difference to the nitty-gritty of the Christian life? And doctrine, I mean doesn't that just, isn't that just sort of a head thing? And you just get confused. I mean is it really anything to do with living the Christian life? And is there any blessing in this? Won't we just go home bored and wishing we'd had a few more songs?

You know, so that's, I'd like to address all of those, either directly or indirectly, and give you the opposite idea. So let's go into this subject. We're thinking about the doctrine of God.

I think you could say, who is God? Who is the God that Christians worship? Who is this person? Last week Daniel gave us this really powerful answer. He is the uncreated creator.

[3:47] He is the uncreated creator. He made their hills and the rivers and the seas and the stars. And he did this. And that is immensely helpful. Like the psalmist said, I lift my eyes to the hills.

Where does my help come from? Well, it doesn't come from the hills. My help comes from the Lord. And how do I know that that help is any use? Because he is the maker of heaven and earth.

So my help comes from the one who is the uncreated creator, the maker of heaven and earth. And if he can't help you, no one can, right? And he can help you because he is the maker of heaven and earth.

So there's a tremendous power in that doctrine to know the all-powerful universe designing, universe creating, universe upholding, almighty one is the one who helps me.

And we think of the way he did it. And we didn't go into that last week. And we're not going to go into it this week either. But he did it by speaking. He's a speaking God. He did it with wisdom.

[5:01] You know, you and I are about clever enough to wire an electric plug. Not that we're allowed to do that these days. But God wired up the whole universe and planned it all. So you think of his wisdom and he did it alone.

He is the creator. He didn't need anybody's help. He did it all by himself. The uncreated creator. Who is God? That is the answer. Who he is. But we can say more than that. And the Bible says more than that.

It doesn't undo that truth, but it says more than that. And as we go on through the Bible, we learn his personal name, Jehovah, Yahweh, translated in English Bibles, the Lord.

And we begin to know him as the God of Israel. And if we look at Israel's story, we learn who God is. And J.I. Packer, the renowned English theologian, I got this idea from him.

It's like when a tennis coach takes one youngster from a group of people who are supposed to learn tennis, takes one youngster to get them to stand out the front.

[6:09] Right. This is how you hold the racket. Like this. Okay. And this is how you do your feet. Okay. And everybody else is watching to learn from this one youngster.

The idea is that this one youngster gets the training and you can see what they're learning. And he or she is meant to be the demonstration for all the others.

And that's what the Lord did with Israel. Took the one nation that all the other nations could learn and see.

And see how God works. See what his ways are. And so on and so on. So that's why our Bible goes specifically to that one nation.

And we look at Israel's story and we learn who God is for ourselves. And like the other boys and girls watching the tennis coach to learn how to play tennis. And it's for them really.

[7:05] It's not just for that one person. It's for them. So we have an Old Testament in our Bible. That's for us. That's our book too as Christians. The Hebrew Scriptures are our book.

The Lord God took one nation chosen for this purpose as his adopted son or as his servant. Through which or through whom to demonstrate his character and his ways for the blessing of the nations.

So in Deuteronomy the nations could look on with envy. What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them as our God is near us when we pray to him.

The nations are supposed to look on Israel and say I'd like to have that God as my God. I'd like to learn his ways. You get it in Isaiah don't you? That the nations flow to Zion.

That the Lord would teach us his ways. That's what Israel was there for. A light to lighten the Gentiles. And the temple was supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations.

[8:08] So as we learn something of the doctrine of God. I am heading for the Trinity but I'm heading for it this way. Let's just follow the story in a quick sort of way.

So God chooses one family through which to bless the nations. That's a picture of Abraham. And he's looking at the stars and God promises him that his descendants will be as many as the stars. If you can count the stars. And the nation goes into slavery in Egypt. And now we find that God is the God of the Exodus.

The God who verbally promises salvation as a sheer promise. Who delivers his people from the bondage of Pharaoh's sin in Egypt.

Jesus delivers us from the bondage of our sin. He delivered his people from the bondage of Pharaoh's sin in Egypt. And there's the pyramid and there's the chains. And there's the escape to the land of promise.

[9:10] And we learn what sort of God God is. He shows his powerful wrath upon Pharaoh who refuses to obey him.

He provides redemption by the blood of the lamb. And the wrath falls on the lamb instead of the people. He takes them across the Red Sea. This is what Yahweh God, Jehovah God, the Lord God of Israel does.

This is his way of doing things. This is his fingerprints all over this. He takes them across the Red Sea. He guides his people through the desert with fire and cloud.

And he feeds his people in the desert with manna. And he promises them a safe forever home. And he comes to live with his people in the...

That one? Tabernacle. Yeah, temple tabernacle. And I've got an... There we go. The Lord comes to live with his people. We learn what sort of God God is.

[10:17] These are like his fingerprints, his characteristics. He's a God of grace. He is a promise maker and a promise keeper. He is a God of moral quality. He is a God of holiness, fairness, justice, compassion.

He is a God who redeems through shed blood. He is a God of nearness. He is a God of nearness. A God who can be approached in the tabernacle and in the temple as we approached him this morning.

He is a God who promises a place for his people. And it's demonstrated on the small scale as a land for Israel. But the fulfillment of that, Romans 4 verse 13, Abraham is the heir of the cosmos. That's where it's all headed for God's people to have the whole of creation as their safe place and their forever home. So that is the Lord God.

That's the sort of thing he does. That's the sort of person he is. And some of it is encapsulated in this. I asked my Jewish friend what this is called.

[11:22] It's called the Shema. And Jewish people are taught to recite this before they go to bed. And they have it written down on the little scrolls that they put by the doorpost.

On every doorpost except the lavatory apparently. And it says this. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. And these are the commands through which you are to express this.

And this is the sort of, I don't know what you would say, the rallying call around the Lord, the God of Israel. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength. If you think of the notional space in which you put God, God fills that.

[12:30] There's no room for any other person or personage in that space marked out as God. He is the Lord, the one. The Lord God is the one.

He is the only one. There is no other God beside him. All the idols that the nations worship are nothing. If you come from a Hindu background, you will know people put their idols on their doors. And temples just are crawling with idols. And the message of the whole Bible is that they are all nothing.

They're all nonsense. They claim to see, but they can't see. They claim to smell, but they can't smell. They claim to walk, but they're just stuck. They claim to be gods, but they're actually just made of wood and stone.

And it's a little bit like the difference between a Rolex watch and what you get from Timu. Anybody here get stuff from Timu? Yeah? Did it fall to pieces or was it okay?

[13:43] I don't wish to be too down on Timu because you can get some bargains. But generally speaking, I would not buy a Rolex. I mean, I would not buy a Rolex full stop. But I wouldn't buy a Rolex from Timu because I think it would be a knockoff plastic version that would break and wouldn't tell you the right time.

And the Bible says all these other gods are Timu gods. They're just plastic imitations that aren't the real thing at all. All the idols are nothing. He is God.

The others are cheap, faulty imitations. And the Bible says if you worship a faulty, deficient, pointless, powerless, meaningless God, you become like him.

You become vain and useless yourself. Which tells us how important it is to worship the true God. The Lord God is the one. He is the Lord.

He is not no God, so the atheists are wrong. He is not two gods. He is one. He is not three gods. Christians are not tri-theists. He is not three million gods as the Hindus, I'm told, believe.

[14:51] He is the one Lord. Hear, O Israel. The Lord our God is one Lord, one God. And because of his totality, the response is that we are to worship him with the totality of what we are.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength. And Jesus amplified it, didn't he? With all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself. That's what it is to be his creatures in his universe, isn't it? He is the one Lord. We're to worship him and love him with just everything we have.

And I say amen. Do you say amen to that? Amen to that. Behold your God, the one true God, the God who really is the God, in Schaeffer's words, the God who is there, the God who answers prayer, the God in whom we live and move and have our being.

Amen. Amen. Amen. So here is a doctrine of God. We just whiz through the revelation of the Hebrew scriptures. And here is the one God.

[16:00] Wasn't he supposed to speak on Trinity this morning? I think he was, wasn't he? So I'm going to say there is yet more. There is yet more.

And something happens which brings us into a mystery which was always there but in the Hebrew scriptures is only revealed in hints and shadows and, oh, I don't know, hints and shadows will do. And the something more is Jesus. Something happens which brings us into a mystery which was always there but only revealed in hints and shadows and that something is Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth and him.

And through him we find an even deeper mystery which we're going to look at in a moment. Now just to say it was always there, it's not newly invented but it wasn't obvious.

So people say it was latent meaning sort of hidden in the old but patent meaning shining forth in the new. Or if you want an illustration of it, it's like a room full of treasure and the treasure's there but there's no light switch and it's all in the dark.

[17:29] And you need a light switch to switch it on and then you could see all the treasure that was there all the time. And the Christ event, if you like, Jesus Christ coming switches on the light by which we can see this mystery of the Trinity.

And it was there in the Old Testament all the time once the light is switched on. So what is there about Jesus that brings us into this new light switch, this new revelation?

Let's go to some places. Will you come with me please to a river? Come to a river.

And one particular man is in the queue.

Is he confessing his sins? John says, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, you're in the wrong queue. And Jesus says, no, it's right to fulfill righteousness.

[19:19] I need to be in that river as if I were a sinner. And I need to tread a path that starts with me taking the place of sinners.

You know where that path's going to end up for this particular person, don't you? And this one man who goes into the water, there he is.

And heaven opens. And a voice comes from heaven. This is my son whom I love. With him I am well pleased.

Wow. Heaven is opened. And the spirit descends on him in the form of a dove. And you think, whoa, what is going on here?

Heaven has been opened. We're allowed to see something into the mystery of divinity, of heaven. And what do we see? We hear the voice of the Father from heaven.

[20:21] We see the Son, the loved Son being baptized, taking the place of sinners. And we see the Spirit descending upon him. We see the Trinity.

If we were Greek Orthodox, we would probably have a little picture of that because that's one of the things that they love. A Trinitarian picture on the wall.

But you've got it on the screen. And you think, wow, something new and amazing is happening here in Jesus Christ. Come with me to another place.

We're going to go, you can find it in Mark 6, 7 and 8 if you want to look across at it. We come to the region of Galilee and there's a desert. There aren't really cacti in that desert, but I put it there to symbolize desert.

And there are hungry people. Does this remind you of anything? Is this going to remind you of anything? A desert, hungry people, water, the sea.

[21:23] And someone takes loaves and feeds the people in the desert. It's not manna, but does it remind you of something?

And this person feeds his people in the desert. And then in all the accounts, the immediate next thing that he does is cross the water, walking on the water.

And I say, does this remind you of anything? Does this remind you of anybody? If you look at the fingerprints here, whose fingerprints are they?

And I think it's pretty clear that Jesus is showing himself to be Yahweh. Because that's exactly what Yahweh did, isn't it?

He fed his people in the desert. He took them through the Red Sea. That was the hallmark of Yahweh God. And Jesus does exactly the same thing.

[22:24] And he says to his disciples, do you not understand what you've just seen? Are your hearts hardened? Are you so dull? Because they didn't get it.

But there it is. Let's get it. Here is the Lord himself. Just like in the tabernacle where he came down to live with his people. The word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The word is to live in a tent, to tabernacle. And here is Jesus doing what Yahweh alone does. To tabernacle with his people, to live with his people.

Do I have a picture of it? Something like that. Yeah. Okay. Let's go to another place. We come to a tomb where a dead person was laid to rest.

Nothing unusual about that. If you go to Cyprus, you can, it's outside Paphos, it's the tombs of the kings. You can pay money to go in and see them. Or you can walk a little bit around the fence.

[23:30] And there are some that you don't have even to pay to go in. I'll just give you that as a top tip. And if you go into these tombs, you go down a few steps. And there are niches on either side where the dead people were laid.

So there's nothing unusual about laying people in a tomb. However, this one is unique because the dead person got up and is no longer there.

The dead person got up and is no longer there. It's an empty tomb. Here is the one place in the universe where death has been totally defeated.

There are other examples of people coming to life after their death, like Lazarus. But it was really a resuscitation. He's going to die again. But this person that I'm referring to will never die again.

Because death has no hold over him. He has defeated, excuse me, the very root of death, which is sin. He's defeated that.

[24:32] He's defeated death. And he's free. And if we were to belong to him, he would free us from death too.

He is the risen Christ. There's the empty tomb. And he is erased from the dead person, erased from the dead human.

Come to the top of another hill, please. And see this human being taken up into heaven in the clouds, rather like the clouds that Yahweh God guided his people with in the desert.

And he goes into heaven surrounded by the clouds that God himself has. And this person goes on to take his seat on the throne of the universe.

He is the risen, glorified, enthroned Savior, Jesus. And that's exactly what Peter was referring to in Acts chapter 2.

[25:37] God raised this Jesus to life. Exalted to the right hand of God. He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

Let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

He is demonstrated as Lord and Christ. He is recognized as Lord and Christ. He assumes the lordship, the explicit lordship of the world.

How many lords are there? One. How much space is there in the space that is occupied by the ruler of the world, the creator, the sustainer of all things?

How much space is there left for someone else? Answer none. The Lord God takes up the whole of that space. And when it's said Jesus is Lord, that means he's not intruding into that space.

[26:39] He is part of that. He is the Son of God. He is the Lord. Jesus is Lord. He is Lord of all.

It's a demonstration and a statement of the divinity of Jesus Christ. And it's enacted in his ascension.

Come to a crowded city. This is what we read about earlier. And it's all abuzz with the aftermath of the execution of this controversial figure, Jesus of Nazareth.

And people are still thinking, did we do the right thing? Who really was he? I know he was crucified. But he doesn't seem to have gone away somehow. And he has risen from the dead.

And his disciples are witnesses of that. And am I right in saying there are 120 people in the upper room? I put 120. I didn't check it. But they've been told to wait for the dawn of a new age, for God's new thing to come into the world.

[27:50] And they're up in that upper room. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, as it says, they've heard so many promises.

The Bible has a whole stream of promises about the age of the Spirit, which is to come. When his Spirit will be poured out on all flesh. The sons and daughters, what does it say? Your sons and daughters will prophesy.

Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams. I will pour out on my Spirit in those days, etc. And they have that.

And they have the words of Jesus. I'm going to breathe my Spirit onto you. Just wait for that. And here on the day of Pentecost, there is the sound of a rushing wind.

There are tongues of fire on the heads of all these waiting believers. And there is the pouring out of the Spirit. So in my little picture here, I've got a watery picture of pouring out.

[28:49] I've got a wind picture of the breath, the blowing. And I've got a fire picture of tongues of fire. And these stupendous sort of visual cues of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

And Jesus significantly has prophesied this as what salvation will be about in the age that he is bringing about.

In the new thing that he is doing. The new covenant. The time of the fulfillment of God's promises. Jesus had said, had gone to the feast.

I think it was the Feast of Tabernacles, was it? And on the last and greatest day of the feast. It's a water pouring. There's a feast where there's water pouring and there's lights being lit.

And on the last and greatest day of the feast. Jesus had stood up and said in a loud voice. Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

[30:08] Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. By this, he meant the Spirit. Whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Up till that time, the Spirit had not been given. Since Jesus had not yet been glorified. And now that Jesus is glorified.

He's died on the cross. He's been laid in the tomb. On the third day, he's been raised again. He's ascended into heaven. He is glorified and he pours out the Spirit.

This is the new thing that God does. And it is wonderful and amazing. Heaven is opened. And we are let in. If you want to put it that way.

And let me just lead it back. The glorification of Jesus. In John's gospel, the glorification of Jesus centers on the cross.

[31:11] So let's go to this hill where there are three crosses. Two terrorists. And in the middle, this one remarkable man.

On the cross, blood is shed. Blood, like in the time of Exodus. But that blood only dealt, if you like, with Pharaoh's sin.

And the bondage of a sort of physical constraint. This blood deals with your sin and my sin.

And frees us from sin and death and Satan. Blood was shed. And as we go to that cross, the sky grows dark.

Like in the time of Exodus, when the nation was under the wrath of God. And the earth quakes like the end of the world.

[32:14] And this man cries out. Done it. Finished. It is finished.

And with that he dies. That hill, Golgotha or Calvary, after which we named our church. And the Roman soldier checks whether he's really dead.

And thrusts the spear into Jesus' side. And out flows blood and water. And this is highly suggestive, isn't it?

Out flows blood and water. That the life-giving stream of the Spirit. Flows ultimately from the wounded side of Jesus.

The gift of the Spirit. Comes ultimately from the cross of Christ. Having died for us. Having been glorified.

[33:15] He pours out that which you now see and hear. And as believing people, we are brought into that. We're brought into that. Let's just join in some of the...

We'll sneak into one of the meetings that these Christian people had earlier on. Do you remember the Shema? Hear, O Israel.

The Lord our God is one Lord. One God. And hear now what is said amongst them. This is in 1 Corinthians. There is but one God.

The Father. From whom all things came and for whom we live. And there is one Lord. Jesus Christ. Through whom all things came and through whom we live. And they've taken that oneness of the Shema. Hear, O Israel.

[34:18] And made it Christian. Hear, this one Lord is God the Father. This one Lord is Jesus Christ the Son. This one Lord is the Holy Spirit.

I don't think it says that there. But later on. Paul is... The Apostle Paul is discussing the life. Just the life of what it is to be in the church.

And this is what he says. Do you spot what he's doing here? He says, this is how it all works, guys. This is how it all works. There are different kinds of gifts.

But the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service. But the same Lord. There are different kinds of working.

But in all of them and in everyone. It is the same God at work. That's 1 Corinthians. Oh, I didn't put the reference. I think it's 1 Corinthians 14. Do you notice what he said?

[35:15] He said that the way it works, guys, is Trinitarian. Because there are gifts of the Spirit. Or let's put it another way. There are different ways of serving the Lord.

Or let's put it another way. The one who works everything together is the same God. And he's just, perhaps even not without even noticing what he said.

He just said, your life as a church is Trinitarian. You live by the Spirit. You serve the one Lord. And it is God who's at work.

Your life is Trinitarian. Or let's put it another way. Let's hear a very new Christian pray a simple prayer. And here they are praying it.

Praying in the Spirit. Of course, that's the only way you can pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for everything. I give my life to you today. Be my heart knower, my guide, and my provider.

[36:19] Through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen. It's a very simple prayer. It's Trinitarian, isn't it? It's Trinitarian. Just to be a Christian is to be caught up in the Trinity.

Now then, this is just a little footnote. When we read the New Testament, we don't find the doctrine of the Trinity emerging gradually as we go through the years. In which the apostles develop their understanding and write their letters.

The doctrine of the Trinity is already present before the New Testament is written. The doctrine of the New Testament, of the Trinity is already present before the New Testament is written.

So where do we end up? Well, we end up believing there is one God. Not three. We're not tritheists. We're not saying there are three gods.

We're saying there is one God. We say the Father is God. God, the Father is God. We say Jesus Christ is God. We say the Holy Spirit is God. Amen?

[37:22] And the three are one. And the Son, they're different. They're not just one person wearing three different hats. The Son is not the Father. But if you see the Son, you see the Father.

He is the express image of the Father. And the Spirit is not the Son. They are distinct. But when the Spirit comes, Jesus comes and the Father comes. He expresses him fully.

And there is the relationships within the Trinity. And this is perhaps where we could go if we did some more on this. But the Father and the Son have a particular way of relating. They're not interchangeable. The Father is the Father of the Son. And the Son is begotten, or as it were, of the Father. It doesn't work the other way around. And the Spirit proceeds from the Father. The Father doesn't proceed from the Spirit. The Spirit proceeds from the Father. And if you're a Western Trinitarian, you'd say, and from the Son. These are the relationships within the Trinity. [38:24] And as I say, there's a deep mystery there. But that's perhaps for another time. And it is such a deep mystery that I think we could say this is proof that Christianity is not just made up by human beings.

It is impossible to get your head around this. But three can be one. But we believe it. And again, referring back to Dr. Packer, who said, all doctrine terminates in mystery. We get to the point where we say, I hear what you said. But I can't understand it any more than that. And when we say, I can't understand it any more than that. We worship. How great thou art. How great thou art. Where do we end up? We can identify the real God. He is the creator. He is the God who is three in one.

If we come across a God who is not three in one and who does not honor Jesus as fully divine, we know that that is not the real God. Any religion that does not honor Jesus as fully divine and co-equal with the Father is false and an insult to Jesus.

[39:32] And that's a good thing to say to Mormons if you meet them. Of course, there's some Mormons around. So what do you think of Jesus? And try and get them to say what they think of Jesus. And ask them whether they think that what Jesus showed was enough.

And they'll say, no, it wasn't really because we have to have the Book of Mormon. And I think we're entitled to say, well, that's an insult to Jesus, isn't it? To say that he isn't enough. That he couldn't tell us enough.

That he needed Joseph Smith to come along and tell us all the rest of it that he didn't know about. We can follow that. And the followers of Arius and the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons, and with all respect to the great religion of Islam, Islam is incorrect, is wrong on this.

Because they do not worship Jesus. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him, says Jesus. And here is our Savior who is the radiance of God's glory.

The exact representation of his being, as it says in that marvelous beginning to the letter of the Hebrews. The Christian life, us, is drawn, we are drawn into the heart of the Trinity.

[40:45] We are adopted by the Father into a relationship of sonship, which is what Jesus has with the Father. Through the redeeming work of the Son, and the sanctifying indwelling of the Spirit of the risen Christ, the Spirit of adoption.

As the Son receives the Spirit, so we receive the Spirit of adoption too. We are drawn into the Trinity. Where do we end up? I hope we will end up as worshippers of the great God, who is powerful, good, gracious, fathomless, triune.

And has given us the inestimable privilege, the privilege you can't work out how great it is, of being caught up into the eternal Trinity.

And I say Amen, and maybe you do too. Amen. Let's close with a song. It's Trinitarian. Glory be to God the Father.

Glory be to God the Son. Glory be to God the Spirit. Great I am the three in one. Glory, glory, while eternal ages run.