

God is Triune and Sovereign

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[0 : 00] Acts chapter 4 verse 1 to 31. My name's Linda for those who don't know me. And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of men came to about 5,000.

On the next day, the rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, all of whom were high priestly family.

And when they set them in the midst, they inquired, By what power or by what name did you do this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed?

Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well.

[1 : 17] This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, What should we do with these men?

For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. We cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.

So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, Whether it's right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge.

[2 : 24] For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people. For they were all praising God for what had happened.

For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than 40 years old. When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, Why did the Gentiles rage and the people's plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed. For truly in this city they were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed

through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

[3 : 48] And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. Amen.

Well, my name's Dave. I'm one of the pastors here. If you're new this morning, a warm welcome to you. And there's a few people who used to be in this church who are here today.

I see Sam and Heidi. Good to see you guys from town. And Nick. It's great to see you. All right. Why don't we pray as we come to God's word?

Let's pray. Lord, we always need your help to understand what you say. But Lord, perhaps especially this morning, as we contemplate who you are in and of yourself, that you are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that you are sovereign over heaven and earth and everything in it. Lord, these are weighty, wonderful truths. And so I pray that your spirit would be speaking to each one of us, giving us the eyes of faith to see you and love you and trust you and obey you.

[5 : 11] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, my prayer is probably going to contradict my opening question, but does it really matter in life to know that God is three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all fully God, but there is one God?

Do you find that that's necessary to know in your everyday life? Does it really matter? Have you already switched off because of the incomprehensibility of that statement?

It sounds like something that belongs in academic textbooks and between big-brained Christians having some philosophical discussion.

It sounds like that's where you talk about the Trinity. Now, obviously, you're expecting me to say, of course it matters in real life, but simply just saying, of course it matters, Scripture teaches it, I'm not okay with that.

How does it matter? Why does it matter? Let me come at this from a different angle, and partly because we're trying to do two massive doctrines here, the doctrine of the Trinity and God's sovereignty, and, yeah, it's been a weighty week.

[6 : 40] Good luck. Let's bring drawing this together in one sermon, and it'll take a lifetime. I think it actually gives us a helpful question, looking at the doctrine of the Trinity from this angle.

What comfort is it simply knowing that God is totally sovereign over all things? What comfort is it knowing simply that he's in control? Because our hearts might think, okay, he's sovereign, but that terrifies me.

He might take my loved one. He might frustrate my goals. He might never forgive me. Sovereignty alone, I suggest, is not a great comfort if it's on its own.

What we need to know is, is God inherently loving? So this morning we continue our travels through worldview-shaping truths that we learn from the beginning in Genesis, and my goal this morning as we consider the Trinity and God's sovereignty is not to prove to you or justify to you that they're scriptural.

That would take too long to do, and I'll leave it to you to do your own study and research. That's not my goal this morning. My goal primarily is working out what difference does it make that God is triune when it comes to thinking about who God is in himself, why he created everything and us, what sin is and what salvation is and how he brought it about.

[8 : 33] And once we know all that in the light of the Trinity, I think we can come back to that question of why it's so comforting to know that he is completely sovereign. So if I've lost you already, let's try and step through this, okay?

Let's start by first considering who God is in and of himself. If we see God as essentially the creator, the power who made everything else, if that's how you view God, he is the creator.

Of course that is true. We've seen that clearly in Genesis. He is the only creator. But if that is fundamental to who God is, then he needs a creation to be the creator.

He's dependent on there being a creation to be a creator. The principal of a Bible college in the UK, Michael Reeves, he's the author of the Bulletin article, he puts this humorously and hopefully you see the humor in it.

He's very much a scriptural man, so don't be put off by what he says. Pretending that God is on a dating website, he says, single God, non-smoker, seeks attractive creation with good sense of humor.

[9 : 55] His point is, if God is a singular God, then for him to be creator, he needs creation to fulfill him in who he is.

In what sense, if God is singular, can we say that he is essentially loving? Because for eternity past, who has he been loving?

Before anything existed, if he was by himself, satisfied on his own, he can't love another. Why would he be motivated to?

To help us even further to appreciate the wonder of the Trinity, I want to look at a critique of it. I heard just a few months ago a prominent Muslim speaker trying to refute it.

His name is Muhammad Hijab from the UK and apparently, according to this podcast, he has formal permission to speak about the Islamic faith. So somehow he's got formal religious permission.

[11 : 07] Here's what he says. Look at the Trinity, for example. The idea of three all-powerful entities, that the Father is all-powerful, that the Son is all-powerful, the Holy Spirit's all-powerful.

The Quran says about this, chapter 22, verse 91, it says, Allah has not taken any Son, and he did not have any Creator with him.

Had that been the case, they would have competed and tried to outstrip one another for power. End quote.

Do you see the objection to the Trinity that Muhammad is raising? Of course the Trinity is a mystery. Like, Christians can't quite define it.

We can say what it isn't, but that's not the fundamental objection here. Muhammad is saying, and he says that the Quran says this, he can't imagine a God who would share power.

[12 : 06] He could not be threatened by the glory going to the other two persons in the Godhead. They would compete. They would try to outstrip one another.

I think that just is a backdrop that sheds light on what the Christian Scriptures say. That the Father has forever poured all of who he is into his Son.

And the Son has delighted in giving himself to the Father, in the joy of the Holy Spirit. There's no competition.

There's no trying to outstrip one another. The Trinity isn't a mathematical problem for you to solve. It tells us that at the core of who God is, is relationship.

Mutual, self-giving love is core to who God is. That all his power is to the service of love.

[13 : 13] Completely united and harmonious, as in their purposes to create the world and move all of history towards the cross and then towards their common goal for all history.

They are completely united. So, do you think of God as fundamentally power, creator?

Or do you think of God as fundamentally the eternal loving community? Relational, self-giving, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So, why? Why did the eternal divine community create a universe if they had no need to?

They were self-sufficient in their love for one another. Why? Well, the ultimate answer is to display his glory. But what does that mean? What does it mean to display his glory?

[14 : 16] A way to understand that is that God wants others to know him. I'm going to quote Michael Reeves again because he can say it better than me. Jesus Christ, God the Son, is the logic, the blueprint for creation.

He is the one eternally loved by the Father. Creation is about the extension of that love outwards so that it might be enjoyed by others. The fountain of love brimmed over.

The Father so delighted in his Son that his love for him overflowed so that the Son might be the firstborn among many sons. We saw in Genesis 1 and 2, the Lord's goal in creation is rest with his people, with his image bearers.

I think this makes more sense of why God speaks of himself in Genesis in the plural. Let us make man, mankind in our image, in our likeness.

Now some see this plural us as a plural of majesty, like a king might say, we welcome you. So some think it's not talking about the Trinity but majesty of God.

[15 : 32] But apparently there's very few examples of that in the Old Testament. So it seems unlikely. Others suggest that it's talking about angels. God is talking about angels. Let us make man in our image.

But nowhere in Scripture does it say that we are in the image of angels. Repeatedly we're told we're in the image of the Creator. Could this triune love be why we image God best or fully, completely in community?

Why he made male and female? Why? Where the clearest image in creation, before the church came into being at least, is the climax of Genesis 2, two people becoming one flesh in marriage. Could that be why? To display persons united in self-giving love. Not to compete and outstrip one another for power, but self-giving love.

That's the picture of marriage. Because it images who God is, the triune God. Now knowing all this, God creating, because he is triune, it tells us about his purpose.

[16:50] We aren't slaves to do the hack work that God doesn't want to do. He doesn't need us to do the hack work. He didn't need us out of loneliness or because he needs a creation to be the Creator.

If creation is the overflow or the extension of the Father's love for the Son, then the purpose of the creation is he wants to share his life with us.

He wants to draw us in. So what about sin? How does the Trinity help us understand sin?

Well, knowing all this gives us a new angle. In previous weeks, we could see that sin is, at the root of sin, is not listening to the speaking God, not trusting that his words are the words to life.

Last week, we looked at the idea of worship, that we were created to love, trust and obey God, and yet we turn away and try and love and trust and obey created things. Now we can add, considering God is triune, sin is a rejection of relationship with God.

[18:06] Now, rejection is something we've all experienced to one degree or another, isn't it? And it cuts to the bone of what we were made for, doesn't it? Whether it's the critical or absent parent or peers targeting you, just shredding you with words or completely letting, not including you, or whether it's a lover leaving you, either literally or withdrawing their emotional warmth, rejection is, it cuts to the bone, doesn't it?

Of what we were made for. I think this shows us, it gives us a taste of how offensive rejecting God is and his love for us.

Christian psychologist Larry Crabb puts it like this, each of us fervently wants someone to see us exactly as we are, warts and all, and still accept us.

But our sin is, we don't look to the Lord to be that someone. We turn to other people, other relationships to be that someone, and they are empty systems, they let us down.

They can't know us completely. They're not gracious like the Lord. In our darkened thinking, we look to people to satisfy our relational thirst when it should have been found in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[19:38] When Adam and Eve were in the garden, they were dependent on God. They wouldn't have known it at first because they were just being totally full of relationship. But once they turned and rejected God, suddenly that dependence turned into an emptiness that we still feel today.

So the Trinity helps us understand who God is, helps us understand why he created us to overflow, to draw us into knowing him. It helps us understand what sin is.

It's rejecting that relationship with him, seeking it in other things, other people. So let's have a look at salvation. How does the Trinity help us understand salvation?

I think it helps us understand what it is, what salvation is, the essence of it. I think the Trinity helps us understand how we're saved and what the saved life produces.

And for this, I want to base it in Acts 4, our reading this morning. Now Peter and John, just for context in Acts 4, Peter and John have just been released from their own arrest and trial.

[20:58] I've never been arrested, not yet, and I don't know what it's like, but that must be a scary experience. All the more, they appeared before the same high priests who weeks earlier, Annas and Caiaphas, who condemned Jesus.

These are the same authorities and yes, public opinion is protecting them at this point. It's protecting them, but they saw, in the case of Jesus, how quickly that could change.

Like, Hosanna in the highest one week, crucify him the next. So yes, I don't think they took comfort from that. The people who hold the keys in society had orchestrated their leader's death and now they threaten them.

You better stop speaking. Now I'd be terrified. What harm they could cause me and my family and this new church that is very young.

That is a scary situation. But what do they pray for? They don't pray for safety. It's an incredible prayer. They don't pray for deliverance.

[22 : 13] I'm not saying it would be wrong not to pray for that. They don't pray for it. Their prayer even highlights the case of Christ.

That suffering was the Lord's will and so suffering might be the Lord's will for them. They know full well that the world is gathered against Christ and so to follow him is putting yourself in the firing line. They pray for boldness to keep drawing attention to Jesus, to keep speaking about Jesus. It's an incredible prayer. I can think of only two reasons why they would pray for boldness rather than safety.

I think the first option is that they pray for boldness because the mission that God has given them is so essential to who they are.

It's their identity. It's their life. They must carry out this mission for them to be who they are. They must succeed. I think that's one explanation but my own experience is that such zeal if it's who you are this mission I don't think that kind of zeal produces humble self-sacrifices.

[23 : 36] I think that produces demanding results. It produces bulldozing people to make sure you you fulfill your mission. Why?

Because my sense of self is at stake. I have to have it. I think the second option is much more likely and I think it's much more in line with the New Testament the rest of the New Testament.

They pray for boldness even though it could cost them their life. Why? Because they already have eternal life. And this eternal life is producing a new desire in them.

Jesus describes what eternal life is like this and hear the Trinity in this this is what eternal life is this is what we enjoy now and we'll have in full later.

John 17 3 and this is eternal life that they know you it's relational know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

[24 : 39] here the believers are confident that they are in right relationship with the sovereign Lord who created all things.

Here they are confident that they belong to the Christ of Psalm 2 that they have found refuge in him. Here they are confident that they've tasted the promised Holy Spirit.

Here they're confident that they are the true people of Israel they are the true people of God not the Jewish leaders because they've already tasted eternal life. They know the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit.

And I think they draw to mind in the case of what happened to Christ how it is they were saved. that it was the Father's plan from the very beginning to forgive them and draw them into eternal life at the cross.

That this self-giving God who created all things pursues sinners like me who rejected his love and treated his love as if it's cheap as if it's an optional add-on.

[25 : 54] He pursues us how does he save us? Instead of pouring out his love on his Son that he's done for eternity he pours out his wrath.

They know eternal. They know they are saved. They know that they can call on him as Abba Father. And I think this explains why they pray for boldness and not for safety.

they have eternal life. And a new energy moves in them a new passion. It's not an energy of self-seeking and self-protection.

It's an energy that goes outwards that wants others to come into this life. They want to draw attention to the life they've found in knowing Jesus.

Now I don't think these believers are heroes. I think their prayer for boldness is actually admitting that they don't have the boldness. They don't have this energy in themselves to sacrifice themselves so that others will come to have life.

[27 : 05] That's not come naturally. But they have a desire for it. There's a new orientation and the Sovereign Lord as the Holy Spirit comes and shakes them and fills them with their spirit to keep pointing to Jesus.

The Sovereign Lord is only too pleased to answer their prayer. It's the Lord who wants to draw others to himself. It's not that these believers are the heroes.

It's that the Spirit is the one producing this energy in them. So if God in and of himself is essentially relational and self-giving, if creation is the eternal community's love overflowing to draw us in, if we were brought into salvation by the Father pouring out his wrath on his Son to forgive our rejection of his love, then to come back to that question at the beginning, it is a great comfort to know that this triune God is the Sovereign Lord of all things.

Look at how the disciples focus on the cross. Verse 27, they recall what happened to Jesus. The peoples were rallied against Jesus.

The motives, Pilate, through wanting to keep the peace in his area rather than administering justice, that sinful motive of Pilate, the sinful motives of the religious leaders who wanted to keep their system of religion so that they're on top, that sinful motive.

[28 : 53] God didn't prevent them. He allowed that to happen but verse 28, all this was to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Our hope is that the Lord that we see at creation is still the Lord. He is above the darkness and the chaos. He is the one who brings order out of chaos.

He is the one who brings light out of darkness but he does it, he wins, by letting darkness win the day and then turning the results for his purposes. That's incredibly sovereign.

I think that's more sovereign than just stopping darkness from doing anything. The sovereign Lord is totally hands-on in every moment and the cross gives us every confidence that the Lord is working for our personal good and that he is going to restore all things.

So I just want to finish by looking at those two things. How does knowing that the trying God is sovereign give us confidence for ourselves and for the whole world? I just realised what I asked there, they're pretty big questions that I won't satisfactorily answer but let's have a go.

[30 : 14] So what about ourselves? Now obviously there's so much we don't know about the Lord's purposes in our sufferings, our circumstances are not self-interpreting in the moment but you know this verse well or I hope you do, Romans 8.28 this is what he's promised and we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose and what is that good in verse 29 we're told for those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers that's the good that we're promised we're going to be made more like Jesus in everything that we come across whatever sin you feel is too strong for you to get rid of whatever sin others have caused or done harm against you whatever loss and heartache we can be confident he's using it all to make us like his son now why is that such good news it's such good news because being more like the son and knowing the son means we know the father better we're being drawn into that eternal community or to put a long term perspective on it he's getting us ready for glory an eternal weight of glory that's not worth comparing to our sufferings he's getting us ready for that eternal community and I think

Romans 12 says it really succinctly what this kind of confidence that God is working good in us can give us we can be joyful in hope we can be patient in affliction and we can be faithful in prayer joyful in hope patient in affliction and faithful in prayer well how is the trying God working all things for good what we're told in Colossians 1 that he is moving all history towards his goal sin and Satan and darkness and the world opposed to Christ are not in control not ultimately he is going to Colossians 1 through Christ reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of his cross our own sin won't have the last word death won't have the last word the world rejecting

Jesus won't have the last word the sovereign Lord will have the final word he will unite all things in his son do you hear the trinity statement he's uniting all things in his son he will have the final say that's our hope and obviously we can't get this confidence by looking at our own lives because my heart is often a sinful mess and the pain is too big for me to bear and we can't look at it looking at the state of the world going oh wow I see progress our confidence has to be looking at the cross that he turned the worst evil for the greatest good that we might be reconciled to him as we gaze at the cross that's when we get this new energy bubbling in us because we've tasted the love of God the triune

God a God that is essentially self-giving wanting to draw people into life when that energy is flowing in us it just gives us a new orientation in life that we want to draw as much attention to the son to the life we've found in the son of God whether in prosperous times or in the trials we want the attention for others to see life is found in Christ let me pray let's pray sovereign Lord we thank you that we can address you as father and I pray that you would help each one of us and as a church go deeper and deeper in understanding what it means for you to be father as we look at how you relate to your son

Lord help those of us who have had fathers that haven't been a good image of you help those of us in particular to discard that image and see who you are through Jesus and Lord I pray that you

would fill us with this same spirit your spirit that wants to draw others into your eternal love Lord we confess that this isn't an energy that naturally resides in us I would much rather be self protecting and looking after my own interests but I thank you that in Jesus we have your spirit to want to and have the power and courage to draw attention to the life we found in him and I pray that for each one of us whatever hardships that might mean whether relationally or at work or our plans [36 : 34] I pray that you would give us boldness to count your love as more important to draw attention to than whatever else we're chasing in Jesus name I pray Amen