

TRINITY 1 - The Trinity and the Bible

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[0 : 00] It is the 2nd of March 2004. The speaker is Andrew Moody and he is speaking on the Trinity and the Bible.

Thanks, Paul. Well, I must say that when I heard I was going to be speaking in a series with Paul Barker and Rhys Bezant and Peter Adam, people with more experience and right to speak and godliness than myself, I was quite nervous and kind of embarrassed.

But as I thought more about the topic, I realised that there was something much more, that I should be much more nervous about, and that is this topic itself. As we come to study God himself, the Trinity, we find ourselves in dangerous waters.

I don't know if you've seen the film Finding Nemo, but there's a scene that takes place near a wrecked submarine surrounded by old rusted mines. Approaching and studying the topic of the Trinity is a bit like that, except there's not just one wrecked submarine, there's dozens of the scenes, and there are many, many ancient rusted mines to bump into.

We need God's grace and help and mercy as we study this to be kept from error and danger and indeed be kept from damnation, I think. Why don't I begin then by asking God to help us?

[1 : 32] Lord God, we thank you that you have revealed yourself and we pray that you will speak through your word tonight and help me and us to understand it correctly. I pray that you'll help me to say true things about you and about your Son and about your Holy Spirit.

I pray that where I go wrong, you'll help everybody listening to be discerning. And I pray that where the things I say are right, that these will lead to praise for you and for your Son and for your Spirit.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Let me come right out at the beginning and say that I believe that the Trinity is a mystery. A mystery so impenetrable that at least 1,500 years of inquiry by God's wisest people was unable to penetrate it.

People searched with the greatest intensity, inquiring, trying to find out what God was on about, but to no avail.

Of course, you probably think you already know that. You know that the Trinity is hard or if not impossible to understand and you wonder why I'm beginning by saying this. Why am I going to say anything at all?

[2 : 47] Maybe we should finish the series. But the mystery I'm talking about is the kind of mystery the New Testament talks about. When the New Testament talks about a mystery, it normally means a secret that was locked up in ages past in the time of the prophets and the writings and is now revealed through the revelation that has come with Jesus Christ.

We, I'm sure, will never fully understand God's nature, how he can be one and how he can be three completely, but what he has revealed of himself through Jesus Christ, we can know something of.

And that's what I want to talk about tonight. To introduce this great mystery, the New Testament takes us back in time, back to the very beginning of things.

Like one of those arthouse films where we see the same scene over and over again from different perspectives, John 1.1 rewrite Genesis 1, taking us back with a new frame, a close-up shot to reveal things that we couldn't see with the wide angle that's from the beginning of the Bible.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, says Genesis 1. In the beginning was the Word, says John 1.1. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[4 : 00] He was with God in the beginning. As we zoom in on God as he creates, we see there is more going on. The simple singularity of God's presence now reveals that the very words that we saw God speaking to create now have a distinct and individual identity of their own.

The Word was with God, and the Word was God. Of course, this isn't a contradiction of Genesis 1. It's a complement of it. God is still the one who makes the world.

Instead, what we see here is an introduction to a fundamental way that the New Testament understands the relationships between the persons of the Trinity. That is, that alongside the one God who creates the world and speaks to humanity and saves his people, there is another in whom God reveals himself and through whom he works and saves.

So, just a few of many passages in the New Testament will reveal this to us. The very next verse from John 1, verse 3, Through him all things were made.

Without him nothing was made that has been made. Or Hebrews 1, In these last days God has spoken to us by a son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the world.

[5 : 19] The son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being. Or Colossians 1.20, God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, or the things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

Or John 14, verse 9, Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own, rather it is the Father living in me who is doing his work.

The pattern that the Son is from the Father and that somehow the Father is expressed in and through the Son is absolutely bedrock to the New Testament's way of understanding the relations between the persons of the Trinity.

And it's also a fundamental element in understanding the Trinity itself because by it we see how the persons can be three and one at the same time. On the one hand, it shows that there is one God and not three.

There is only one God because there is only one source of divinity, one source of divine purpose and power and creativity. And that centre is called the Father. Paul, writing in 1 Corinthians 8.6, refutes the idea that there might be more than one God by saying, For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist and one Lord Jesus through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

[6 : 49] 1 Corinthians 8.6. Note how Paul preserves the unity of God by telling us that the Father alone is God. Yet at the same time, he immediately follows it up with this statement of speaking about the Son through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

The Son, too, Paul is saying, is to be credited with everything God is and does because everything that the Father is and does is expressed through him. Now, if this sounds confusing and disturbing, here is an illustration that might help.

I think it is a bit like walking into a shop, one of those old family-run businesses, where the sign on the door is Smith and Son. Now, when you go into the shop, you'll find that Smith is the older man sitting out the back doing the paperwork.

But funnily enough, if you ask the young man at the counter what his name is, it's Smith. Somehow Smith is the man out the back and yet the man at the counter is also fully Smith.

When the name Smith is applied like a name, a personal name, it's the man out the back. He's the one whose name is on the sign out the front, Smith and Son.

[8 : 10] When it refers to a nature, a family name in this case, then, of course, the younger man, Smith's son, is as Smith as the first Smith. There's both one Smith and two Smiths.

In the first sense, there's only one Smith. In the second sense, that's the older man and the younger man are Smith in exactly the same way. I'll just have a drink while you think about that for a minute.

Now, of course, this analogy isn't perfect. Although Father and Son language is dominant in the way the relations between the first and second persons of the Trinity are portrayed in the Bible, and although a passage like Ephesians 3, verse 15, makes it sound suspiciously like human fatherhood derives somehow from the original model, which is God's relationship to his son, there are still some crucial differences between the way human parents and their children are related and the way God the Father and his son are tied together.

And maybe you thought of some of those problems as I was drinking my drink. One important difference, of course, is that human parenthood is kind of generic and historic. Now, what I mean by those words is that a father has a son at a certain point and in one sense that concludes their connectedness.

The son is now another Smith or another Moody or whatever. And the father dies and the son goes on being that Smith or whatever. It's as if the Smith has produced a second Smith.

[9 : 50] But with God things are much more dynamic than that. In the first place there's no moment when the father produced the son. Their relationship is eternal.

I am the Alpha and the Omega says Jesus in Revelation 22 echoing the words of God the Father in verse 6 of the previous chapter. The father has always been and the son has always been and the father has always been the father and the son has always been the son.

Nor is the relationship between God and his son simply generic as if God had somehow butted off another God. The son's sonship is not something that he got from the father and now possesses independently.

So we might say he's another God just like his father before him. Rather the divine nature that is whatever it is that makes him God is imparted to him continually and dynamically.

as communicated by words like word from John 1 or radiance from Hebrews 1 or the description of the father living in him and doing his work as we saw in John 14.

[11 : 00] This dynamism of course is more normally expressed in personal ways or in personal interactions. Here the son is the one through whom God creates and speaks like a parent might involve his or her child in a project or send them with a message.

Here the son is the father's perfect agent in all that the father is and does. Listen to how Jesus puts it in John chapter 5 verses 17 to 23.

Jesus said to them my father is always at his work to this very day and I too am working. For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him not only was he breaking the sabbath but he was even calling God his own father making himself equal with God.

Jesus gave them this answer I tell you the truth the son can do nothing by himself he can only do what he sees his father doing because whatever the father does the son also does for the father loves the son and shows him all he does yes to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these.

For just as the father raises the dead and gives them life even so the son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover the father judges no one but has entrusted all judgment to the son that all may honour the son just as they honour the father.

[12 : 19] He who does not honour the son does not honour the father who sent him. Now do you see how this text brings together the things that we've just been talking about?

In verse 18 the Jews recognise that when Jesus is calling God his father he's claiming to share God's nature his divine nature.

Certainly there have been other sons of God before in the Old Testament. Angels are sometimes called sons of God. Kings of Israel of the Davidic line are called sons of God in Psalm 2 or 2 Samuel 7 and of course Israel itself say in Exodus 4 is called God's firstborn son but when the word or the term is applied to these beings it seems to be something that is delegated or given to them.

Angels and kings have in some sense a God-like authority given to them. Israel is chosen by God and given the status of God's firstborn son this special place in God's purposes.

But with Jesus the term is used so frequently so naturally and so personally without any qualification that it's impossible to avoid the idea that he's claiming to be God's son by nature.

[13 : 37] To the Jews of course this is blasphemy. Hear O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one says the famous passage known as the Shema in Deuteronomy 6 verse 4 but here is another person claiming also to have the divine nature making himself out to be equal with God.

Leaving aside for a moment the fact that they think he's just a man it sounds like a fundamental attack on the idea of monotheism that there is only one God. But Jesus quickly heads off this idea.

The fact that he shares God's nature and is therefore equal with God does not mean that he is holding himself up as an alternate or competing power or competing God or a separate source of divinity.

His equality with God is real and natural but it's also dynamic and dependent so that the unity of God is preserved. I tell you the truth he says the son can do nothing by himself he can only do what he sees his father doing because whatever the father does the son also does.

So if the son's relationship to the father is natural like a son it is also dynamic like a process. This is really crucial. If all we saw was the natural relationship then we might think that he was claiming to have the nature of God from God independently.

[15 : 01] God had given birth to another God which is what the Jews seem to be thinking he was saying. But then again if all we had was God working through him dynamically we might conclude that he was a kind of exalted servant a super angel like the Jehovah's witnesses say.

The actions that the father does through him wouldn't really belong to him. They're just things that God did through him. It would be the father alone who would be the owner of those actions ultimately.

But as it is he inherits both the father's nature and the father's actions. actions. And so it's right to see him both as the agent and as the one who owns the things that are done through him.

So we read whatever the father does the son does also. And just as the father raises the dead and gives them life even so the son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. And again the father judges no one but has entrusted all judgment to the son that all may honour the son just as they honour the father.

On the one hand we hear that it's the father working and the son can do nothing of himself. Yet on the other hand when the father works through this son the son also receives full credit for it because he is connected to God by nature.

[16 : 24] Now here's another analogy which might help explain this because that sounds confusing to me. imagine that your father has a unique and special and valuable heirloom perhaps a gold watch which has been in your family for 300 years and passed down from generation to generation.

And when your father dies this watch will become yours, it's your inheritance. And now imagine that your next door neighbour gets sick and the only way she can be saved is by an expensive medical procedure which neither she nor anybody she knows can afford.

But your father comes to you and he says this, I want you to do something that's very difficult. I want you to take this watch of mine and I want you to take it to the auction house and I want you to get the best price you can for it and I want you to take the money and give it to our neighbour so she can have the operation that she needs.

And you look at that watch and you quietly take it and you go and sell it and you take the money back and you give it to your neighbour and her life is saved. Now who does your neighbour thank?

Who is worthy of being thanked in this situation? Somebody might say that it's your father after all it's his watch. You just ran the errand for him.

[17 : 52] But of course that would be crazy wouldn't it? The watch is your inheritance as well. Because you share your father's nature you're in his line the watch is your sacrifice as well.

And the way your father performs this act of generosity ensures that you will be thanked. You are the one who takes the watch and sells it and gives the money to the lady who is saved by it.

You share completely in the sacrifice and you personally receive thanks from the sick woman and her family. Well this is something like the pattern we see in the relationship between the father and son isn't it?

The father does everything through the son and shares everything he does with his son and he works in this way specifically to bring honour to his son. The father loves the son and shows him all he does.

The father judges no one but is entrusted all judgment to the son that all may honour the son just as they honour the father. It doesn't have to be this way of course.

[18 : 58] We can quite easily imagine a situation where God the father could work through his son but the son be transparent or invisible in that action. We can imagine it because that's how it was in the Old Testament can't we?

In Genesis 1 the word was there with God creating the world through him the father was creating the world through the word but we don't find out about it till we're told about it in John 1.

And that also of course is how things are for the Holy Spirit in the New Testament pretty much. Along with the son we're told that there's a third person through whom the father works and is expressed and through whom the son it works and is expressed.

But his way of working and his way of revealing is mostly transparent. So if the son is like the radiance which we see from a light source, the way we come to see the light itself, the Holy Spirit is more like a lens which allows us to see the light and focuses that light.

It's necessary for us to see the light and the radiance and the light source but it's transparent in that process. So Jesus says in John 3 that it's like the wind, you hear the effects of his passing but you can't see him.

[20 : 16] Here are some more passages which say the same kind of thing. John 16 verses 13 to 15 Jesus before he's crucified talks about the coming of the Holy Spirit. When the spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth so he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the father has is mine. We see almost exactly the same kind of thing when Jesus announces the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1.8 before he goes up to heaven.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Notice how in these passages the spirit's mission is to facilitate the glorification and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is seen at the centre of his mission. He doesn't speak on his own but only what he hears. Implicitly he doesn't glorify himself, he brings glory to Jesus. Jesus here is at the centre of the Trinity's work.

All the father's purposes and glory are manifest and made visible in him and at the same time on the other side the Holy Spirit is there revealing the son invisibly but necessarily and making his work and applying his work to the creation.

[21 : 43] people often get upset when they come to hear things about the Trinity because not enough gets said about the Holy Spirit. We heard a lot about the father and son they'll say but what about the Holy Spirit?

Well often that is a fair criticism and it's probably a fair criticism tonight. I'm probably not doing justice to the Holy Spirit. But on the other hand the Holy Spirit doesn't want to talk that much about himself.

His manner of agency, his manner of divine nature, his manner of working is to reveal the son. He doesn't want to talk about himself or glorify himself that much. So although we know he exists, although we know that God creates the world and sustains the world through him, although we know that we couldn't become Christians unless he was at work in our lives, although we know that it's his mission to send out the message of Jesus across the world, he does this mostly transparently.

He wants us to talk about Jesus a lot. He wants us to become like Jesus and works in our lives to make that happen. It's Jesus the Holy Spirit wants us to look at.

The glory of Jesus is the focus of the Spirit's work just as it is the focus of the way the Father works in the world, which brings us back to where we were before, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father.

[23 : 05] Now, let me ask how you would go about introducing the story of the Bible to somebody.

Where would you begin? What bits would you include? Where would you head towards as you're wrapping up the story of the Bible? What are the major points?

I think most of us would probably begin with creation and talk about sin and God's efforts to save us. And especially major on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by which our sins are taken away.

In short, we would present a summary of what is commonly called salvation history. Now, I've got no wish to disagree with that. That is a good way to present the Bible story and a necessary way.

The first reason why we want to know about the story of the Bible is so that we can see where we stand in God's purposes. It's a matter of life and death. And we want to know how to be saved. We want to know where we are headed and how we fit into God's purposes.

[24 : 08] But at the same time, there is another way of beginning to tell the story of the Bible. And this way begins before the creation of the world and focuses on God's secret plan to bring glory to his son.

We've already glimpsed this plan and purpose in John 5.23 that all may honour the son, even as they honour the father who sent him. We also saw it explicitly in Hebrews 1 verse 2, which speaks about God appointing his son to be heir of the universe.

But we can find other references to it as well. It's there in Colossians 1.16 where Paul writes that all things were created by him and for him. Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him.

It's there in Ephesians 1 also where Paul speaks of God choosing us in Christ before the creation of the world and revealing the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times have reached their fulfilment to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

God's secret purpose for this creation, for this world, for history is to bring everything together under the authority of his son. Now of course when I speak about this deeper purpose that lies behind salvation history, I'm not suggesting that it's separate to salvation history.

[25 : 32] In fact the two are intimately connected. On the one hand, as we'll see when Paul Barker takes us to Revelation 5, it's the cross which supremely brings honour to the son.

Although he is rightly called creator because the father creates through him, although he is rightly called the sustainer of the universe as it says in Hebrews 1, chapter 1, the thing that brings the universe to its knees in the throne room of God is his death on the cross for us.

That's the way he wins a people for himself. That's the way he shows God's glory by showing God's grace and God's nature in the most supreme way.

That is where his father's nature is revealed most completely through him. That is where he wins for himself a people who will be for his glory. What is more, the son's glory and our salvation are connected not just by his death but by his resurrection.

When Jesus rises from the dead, it is still as a human. It is a transformed humanity, a spiritual humanity as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, but he's still a human nonetheless.

[26 : 48] His humanity is now not simply a state of humiliation which he underwent for our salvation, part of the process of dying and bearing our sins, though it was that.

His resurrection, his humanity is transformed to be the shell or the lens of his glory. He is and remains forever a human.

And so his destiny and ours are completely interlocked in the purposes of God. So when the writer of Hebrews wants to prove that Jesus is superior to angels, the verses he quotes from the Old Testament are about human beings.

Firstly, he turns to Psalm 2 and Psalm 45 and 2 Samuel 7 which mention the honour given to the Davidic king to be called the son of God. Angels aren't given that right to be called the son of God, but it's humans who are in those verses.

It's the Davidic king. In the next chapter of Hebrews, things are even more shocking because here he turns to Psalm 8 which isn't about just a king but about humans in general.

[28 : 01] Have a listen to Hebrews 2, reading from verse 5. It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come about which we are speaking. But there is a place where someone has testified.

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels. You crowned him with glory and honour and put everything under his feet. In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him.

Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

In bringing many sons to glory it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family.

So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. What an astonishing claim that is. Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers.

[29 : 07] The eternal word, the son of God, the one who shares fully in the divine nature of the father, has become and stays one of us. And the effect on this is that all God's promises to us turn out to be promises to the son.

We have the Old Testament thinking these prophecies are about us. But it turns out that the prophecies about humanity are really prophecies about the son because he is the archetypal human.

He is the one who fulfills everything that we are and all the promises that God makes about us. It's as if somehow we've been scooped up in the arms of the father as he hugs his son and brings blessings to his son.

What do you think this says about what it means to be a human? What does it say about human nature that the son of God could become one of us and remain one of us?

What does it say about humanity that the father would want his son to become one of us? Just recently I finished reading *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* to my daughter for the first time.

[30 : 19] I was struck again by that great scene where Aslan reaches the witch's castle and begins turning all the creatures who have been turned to stone in the courtyard back to flesh, undoing the witch's magic.

When it's all done, Aslan organises his new army and they prepare to go and fight the queen. He says, those who can't keep up must ride on the backs of those who can, that is lions, centaurs, unicorns, horses, giants and eagles.

Those who are good with their noses must come up in front with us lions to smell out where the battle is. Look lively and sort yourselves. And with a great bustle and cheering, they did.

The most pleased of the lot was the other lion who kept running about everywhere, pretending to be very busy, but really in order to say to everyone he met, did you hear what he said? Us lions!

That's what I like about Aslan. No side, no standoffishness. Us lions. That meant him and me. In the eternal side, we have one who says, us humans, who is unashamed to call us brothers.

[31 : 33] And of course, it doesn't stop there. Humans are not just special because Jesus is able to become one of us and stay one of us and receive the promises which are made to us.

The promises are still ours in him. Just as he shares or shared what we are, now the New Testament is full of promises that we will share everything that he is.

Well, I have begun to share it now. As Paul keeps putting it, in him, we have everything that Jesus has. 1 John 3, verse 2.

Dear friends, now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Revelation 3, verses 21 and 22.

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my father on his throne. Romans 8, 16 to 17.

[32 : 34] The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs. Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. If indeed we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory.

Ephesians 2, verses 6 and 7. God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

The mystery of the Trinity is finally a secret that emerges around us and amongst us. It's the Father working through his Son and in his Son to bring glory to his Son.

It's the Holy Spirit working invisibly on the same project. It's the Son humbling himself and becoming one of us and then being raised as a glorious human, a perfected human by the will of the Father.

And it's the glory due to our Saviour Jesus Christ. He not simply bears our sins but brings us into the Father's presence and embrace forever.

[33 : 48] God bless the Father's. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
. . Thank you.