

The Trinity

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[0 : 00] Well, as I mentioned during the reading, I want us to spend a few minutes tonight thinking about the doctrine of the Trinity. When we think of God, often we can find ourselves perhaps focusing on the Father, or maybe thinking about the Son, Jesus Christ, or sometimes our attention is drawn to the Holy Spirit.

But the doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that really all three should be in our minds. When we come to think about God. And the doctrine of the Trinity is an amazing thing to think about. It is a profound and glorious topic. And it shows us two things. It shows us, first of all, that God is beyond us.

He's beyond our understanding. He's beyond the limits of our minds. He is stretching us. When we think about God, our minds are being stretched to their very limits.

And even then, we can't grasp the fullness of who God is. So, at one level, we're being reminded that God is beyond us. And, of course, that's totally logical.

[1 : 16] Because God is God. And we are not. But at the very same time, the doctrine of the Trinity reminds us of the nearness of God. Because it is showing us that God wants us to know him.

And he is even sharing himself with us. So, we are being reminded of the astounding beyondness of God. And the amazing nearness of God.

Now, the doctrine of the Trinity is generally summarized by saying that God has one nature and three persons.

Now, what exactly does that mean? Well, when we say that God has one nature or one substance or one being, you can use any of these words.

We are saying that God is, first of all, indivisible. You can't separate God into various parts. He has one substance.

[2 : 22] That is undividable. And at the same time, that nature makes God unique. Absolutely nothing else has this God nature.

We have human nature. Because we're humans. Animals have animal nature. Plants have plant nature. That's what makes them what they are. God. And God alone has his own nature.

God has God nature. I suppose you can put it like that. But what does that nature look like? Human nature is a body and a soul, isn't it?

When one is lost, when they are separated, we go from being alive to being dead. What does God's nature look like?

Well, God's nature, God's single nature, is made up of three persons. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.

[3 : 30] Now, there is, of course, an element of mystery to that, that we cannot fully explain. But it is not illogical. Only God has God's nature.

And that nature is a nature which is made up of three persons. God is a trinity. Three in one. One substance and three persons.

One God. Now, there are many, many things that we could look at under the heading of the trinity. And it's a wonderful topic to read about. A wonderful topic to think about.

You see the amazing equality and unity within the Godhead. And the fact that they share together. And the fact that they are the source of life.

Father, Son, Spirit. One God. As the source of all existence. There's many, many things that we could think about. Tonight, I want us to focus on one area in particular.

[4 : 29] And that's the fact that God the Trinity engages in a shared work. The three persons of the Trinity.

Father, Son, and Spirit. Work together in order to accomplish God's purposes. Now, we'll be picking up various parts of scripture in order to piece this together.

But we are being reminded of this truth in the verse that we read in John 17, chapter 4. Where God the Son says to God the Father. I have glorified you on earth.

Having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. We're going to look at that work together tonight. That shared work of the triune God.

And we're going to look at three areas. The first two we're going to look at briefly. And then the third one we'll look at in a wee bit more detail. The first thing that we can say is this. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit work together in creation.

[5 : 37] The Bible makes it abundantly clear that God is creator. And we read from the very beginning of the Bible. And when you read Genesis 1, 1.

The second thing that you learn about God is that he is the creator. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. So right from the very start, the second thing that we learn about God is that he is creator.

And I'm sure you're saying, what's the first thing that you learn? Well, the first thing you learn about God is that he was in the beginning. That he has no beginning. That when everything else began, God was already there.

As creator, we see from scripture that each person of the Trinity participates in that creative work. We read a bit about that in Genesis 1, 2.

The earth was without form and void. Darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Go all the way forward to John 1, 1.

[6 : 44] We read, In the beginning was the Word, which is of course referring to God the Son. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through him. And without him was not anything made that was made. And then Hebrews 1, verse 1 and 2 says the following.

Long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

These verses are showing us that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all participate in the work of creation. And this is brought out very beautifully in the creation of humans.

We read Genesis 1, 26 and 27. Listen to what it says. Then God said, It's not a working of the doctrine of the Trinity.

[8 : 15] But it does give us many, many pointers in that direction. And Genesis 1, 26, where it says, Let us, is one of these pointers.

And all this is highlighting a very simple, but a very glorious point. That's the fact that you, you, you, are the creation of God, the Holy Trinity.

You are the work of the triune God. And I think that's part of the wonder of the complexity of the human body.

It's, it is just, it is amazing how it all works. You look at your own body. Look at your fingers. Look at how they move. Look at your, your, um, respiratory system.

Look at, uh, your kidneys functioning. Cleansing your blood. Look at how everything stays in perfect balance. These thousands upon thousands of tiny veins and capillaries carrying blood from your heart, round your body, back to your lungs, back to your heart, round your body, back to your lungs.

[9 : 27] It is astonishing how it all works. And yet we should not be surprised because the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are very, very skilled.

And they are very capable. And this means that when God looks at you tonight, there is delight shared among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

Because you are his workmanship. You are the workmanship of each person of the Trinity. Now that emphasizes the preciousness of creation in general.

It too is the work of the triune God. But it particularly highlights the preciousness of each and every human being. In fact, that's what makes us precious as human beings.

It is only as the created work of God that human life really has value. We are his workmanship.

[10 : 36] And of course, that's why sin is such an awful thing. Because sin ruins precious people.

And you and I know that so well. We can look around, even in our communities here in Lewis, we can see people whose lives have been ravaged by sin.

Precious people who are being destroyed. Absolutely destroyed by sin. It's what makes sin so awful.

But it's also what makes becoming a Christian so wonderful. Because when you come to faith in Jesus Christ, really it's like a homecoming.

Because you are simply coming back to the God whose handiwork you are. Because it is when you are outside of Christ. It's when you are keeping God away. That's where you are in a strange place. [11 : 39] That's where you are where you don't belong. It's when you come back to God. That is where you were created to be. That is where you belong. That's why becoming a Christian is just, it's like a homecoming.

It's the greatest homecoming of all. So that's the first point. Father, Son and Spirit share in the work of creation. The second point is this.

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit work together in revelation. We read a few verses from Genesis chapter 1. And as you read Genesis chapter 1, you can be struck by many amazing things. The fact that God is in the beginning. The fact that he is the ground of reality. And from him comes everything else that has ever come into being. The fact that he works so actively and powerfully in creating the universe, the stars, the planets, the sun, the moon, and the world with everything that inhabits it.

And the fact that we are the work of his hands. So many glorious truths are being presented to us in Genesis chapter 1. But as we read these verses, we can easily miss what is quite probably the most amazing truth of all.

[12 : 51] The fact that God is speaking to us. That's the real astonishing truth of Genesis 1 and of every chapter in the Bible.

That God is talking to you and to me. And the reason that he does that is because he wants us to know about him.

And he wants us to know him. And that is quite remarkable because the words, in the beginning, God, remind us that God is above all other realities. He is independent.

He doesn't depend on you or me. He doesn't need us at all. God doesn't need me. And yet he wants me.

And you. God wants to reveal himself to us. And please don't ever lose sight of how amazing that is.

[13 : 54] God wants to talk to you. God wants you to know things. God wants you to learn all about him.

God wants you to know him. Every single time we open our Bible, we are hearing God's voice. It is his revelation to us.

But that work of revelation is a shared work. Because God the Father speaks. As Matthew 1.11 reminds us.

A voice came from heaven. You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased. The Holy Spirit speaks. As 2 Peter 1.21 reminds us. No prophecy was ever produced of the will of man.

But men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. And God the Son himself speaks. John 12.49 For I have not spoken on my own authority.

[14 : 53] But the Father who sent me has given me a commandment. What to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say therefore, I say as the Father has told me.

So all three persons of the Trinity speak. And that last passage we read from John 12 reminds us. That there is a collective coherence in all that God the Holy Trinity says to us.

And that same truth was highlighted in John 16. As we read. And you can look at it in front of you there if you wish. In verse 13 it says. When the Spirit of truth comes. It's the Holy Spirit.

He will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own authority. But whatever he hears he will speak. And he will declare to you the things that are to come.

He will glorify me. For he will take what is mine and declare it to you. So you have God the Holy Spirit taking what God the Son has said.

[15 : 49] And is revealing it to us. Father, Son and Spirit working together. That means that every time we open our Bibles. We are hearing the message that God the Holy Trinity wants us to hear.

It's a great reminder that reading your Bible is not just a kind of thing to just tick off your daily list. And Bible reading can become that.

I remember when I was younger. You were always told to read your Bible every day. And I used to do it. But it was kind of like a duty that I felt I had to do.

And you felt I must get to the end of this chapter. And I must get to the end of this passage. And if I haven't done it, I must do it. God won't be happy with me if I haven't done it. And it became very, very, very ritualistic, I suppose.

In my own experience. And I was coming at my Bible in the wrong way. Because reading your Bible is not a chore to tick off your list.

[16 : 54] It's not a job that you must get done. Reading your Bible is an encounter with the living, triune God. And so we should come.

And whether we read a little bit or a lot. It doesn't really matter. As long as we pray, Lord, help me to listen. And as long as we take God's word with us.

In our minds. And into our lives. And so in God we see this shared work of revelation.

Which manifests itself in the Bible that we have before us. And the Bible is a glorious presentation of divine truth.

Just think about the Bible for a moment. It is an astonishing book. It records the greatest events of history. It presents to us the most profound and relevant teaching.

[17 : 57] Even thousands of years after it was written. It touches on the deepest levels of human experience and emotion. It gives us the most precious of promises. It expresses the most beautiful and vivid poetry.

It conveys astounding descriptions. And gives us awe-inspiring visions. It is an absolutely astonishing revelation that we have before us. And the greatest material possession that you and I can ever have.

Is our Bible. It is astonishing. It is astonishing. It is the work of the triune God. But who is it all for? It's for you. God is not revealing himself to the creation. He's revealing himself to you.

Because God wants you to know him. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit share in the work of revelation.

[19 : 07] The fact that God wants you to know him takes us to our third point. Which we'll just spend a wee bit more time on tonight. Because the Bible also reveals to us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit work together in salvation.

Indeed, that's the great message of the Bible. A message of salvation. Humanity has fallen from its original status. And sin has left us in desperate need. And I don't need to prove that to any of you. You look at the world and you can see the absolute chaos that sin has left us in. But the Bible's message is that God has not abandoned us.

And through the pages of Scripture, we are presented with an account of redemptive history. A record of what God has done across the ages of history in order to redeem us.

To rescue us from our desperate predicament. And that work of salvation is a glorious work which is shared between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

[20 : 15] Now, we can only just touch on this and scratch the surface tonight. But we're going to say three things. First of all, when it comes to the plan of salvation, the Father initiates, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies.

As we said, sin has left humanity in a dreadful state. And we see the wreckage of that all around us. And even in our own lives, we can see the brokenness and pain that sin causes.

And our sin gives God every reason to walk away from us. Remember, God, as the Trinity, is independent of everything else. He does not need us. But even in the moments after Adam's fall, we see that God is initiating a plan.

Genesis 3.15 tells us that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. The kingdom of evil will be defeated. And God is going to send a Savior. And so God the Father initiates a plan which will culminate in the coming of a Savior.

And that Savior is Jesus Christ, God the Son. And he comes to accomplish all that is required for salvation. That's what he is referring to in the verse we read in John 17.4.

[21 : 35] I have accomplished the work that you gave me to do. Now that work of salvation was no small task. If you ask yourself the question, what needs to be accomplished for people like you and me to be saved?

What needs to be accomplished? Well, we need somebody who can represent us as a fellow human. We need a sacrifice that will cover our sin and that will turn aside the wrath of God.

We need somebody whose standard is adequate to satisfy all that God requires. We need somebody who can keep God's righteous requirements without any faults. We need somebody who can stand up to the power of the devil.

Someone who can defeat and destroy the kingdom of evil. We need someone who can pay the penalty of sin in full, which culminates in death itself. And we need somebody who can now be exalted as head over all heaven and earth so that we know that victory is certain.

We need God himself to save us. And Jesus Christ does all of these things. He accomplishes every single step.

[22 : 55] And that's why he said it is finished. So God the Father initiates. God the Son accomplishes. And then God the Holy Spirit comes and applies all of this to the believer.

The Holy Spirit calls us and softens our hearts. The Holy Spirit comes and regenerates us into new spiritual life. The Holy Spirit unites us to Christ through faith.

And therefore Christ's death pays our penalty and his risen life gives us eternal life. And as a result we are adopted into the family of God with the Spirit of God's Son himself in our hearts by which we cry, Abba, Father.

And as the Spirit comes and dwells in our hearts it begins a work of sanctification. So that those who are rescued from sin are being transformed to be more and more like Jesus. Back to bearing the image of God as we were originally intended to be.

And so in all of this the Trinity is working together perfectly. Every area is covered. Every step of the plan is achieved. And everything that needs to be done is done.

[24 : 04] And what do we do? We benefit. And we thank God with all our hearts.

And so God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit has a perfect plan of salvation. Secondly, when it comes to the work of salvation, we see that the Father sends, the Son comes, and the Spirit remains.

The Father sends his Son. And that's what John 3.16 is talking about. At the heart of that sending is the love of God.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. That whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. So when you ask the question, why did God send his Son?

Why did he send the precious, precious, eternally loved and cherished Son? Why did God do that? Because of how much he loves the world.

[25 : 18] Now when we think of the world, we can think of many beautiful things. You can think of people gazing at a beautiful sight. When you look at a stunning day like we've had over the past few weeks here in Lewis.

You think of people sharing in happy moments together. Maybe as a church, maybe as a family, maybe as a community. You can think of people doing good things, which we do see in so many ways.

We see lots of good things in the world and God loves that world. But you and I know that the world is also full of awful things.

You can think of a housing scheme that is ravaged by addiction and broken relationships. You can think of countries that are ripped apart by war and conflict.

You can think of communities desperately needing food and shelter and water. And you see lives broken and families shattered by the cruelty and betrayal of others.

[26 : 29] You see lives broken and broken and broken and broken. In many, many ways the world is a mess. But God still loves that world.

He doesn't like the sin that he sees, but he loves the world that is on the receiving end of it. He loves it so much that he gave.

He sent his most precious possession of all. And that word gave in John 3.16, it has the highest level of cost behind it.

The highest level that we could ever imagine because he gave his son. But that's because it has the highest level of love behind it that we could ever, ever imagine.

So the father sends, the son comes. And that coming involved a huge change for the son.

[27 : 28] That's why it's referred to as his humiliation. Now, the word humiliation is not in the sense of being embarrassed by something, but in the sense of being made low.

That's what Paul talks about in Philippians 2.5. Have this mind amongst yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God.

That's pointing us to the Trinity existing from all eternity, Father, Son, and Spirit. He was in the form of God, yet he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, a thing to be held on to. But he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

These verses are reminding us that the son had to lay aside so much. He had to take up all the frailty and vulnerability of human flesh. He had to be exposed to the pain and agony that sin has brought into the world.

[28 : 36] He had to face the hostility and rejection and brutality of his very own people that he had made. He had to endure physical and emotional agony, and he had to taste death itself.

And you imagine the son preparing for that, and you can picture in your minds the father preparing to send the son, and the realization of all that this was going to involve, and the father saying to the son, Will you go?

And the son replies, Of course I will go. I will go and do the work that you have given me to do. And the glorious outcome of that work is that the son has been raised, and he has now returned to his father's right hand.

But here on earth, we still need God with us. We can't manage on our own. And God, the Holy Trinity, knows that. So the father sends, and the son comes, but the spirit says, I will remain. And as John 14 and 16 tells us, Jesus said, I will ask the father, and he will give you another helper, to be with you forever, even the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.

[30 : 04] You know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. And that is the glory of the abiding presence of God, the Holy Spirit.

He doesn't apply salvation to us, and then leave. He applies salvation by coming to make us, to make you as a Christian, his dwelling place.

And as we said this morning, that's why you as a Christian, can never be without God. Can never be without him. And so we have a father who has sent, and he has sent everything that we need. And we have the son who has come, and has done everything for us, that we couldn't do for ourselves. And we have the Holy Spirit who remains, who will never, ever leave us.

God, the Holy Trinity, is working together so perfectly. So we've thought about the plan of salvation, we've thought about the work of salvation.

[31 : 09] But finally, when it comes to receiving salvation, the Father promises, the Son secures, and the Spirit guarantees.

And this is why we as Christians, can have assurance. Now this is a really, really important point. Assurance does not come from feelings.

Assurance comes from theology. It comes from listening to what God has said in his word. So do not worry if you have not had the feeling that somebody else has had, or the experience that somebody else has had, or the fact that you look at yourself and you feel that you are not what you want to be, or not what you are.

Assurance does not come from feelings. It comes from the truths of Scripture. And Scripture tells us that God the Father promises you salvation.

He promises it to you, that whoever believes will not perish, but have everlasting life. That is an unchangeable, unbreakable promise from the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

[32 : 29] And that promise is certain because God the Son has secured everything that we need. Absolutely everything that is required has been secured.

So ask the question, can someone like you have your sins forgiven? Now, whether you are a Christian or not a Christian, ask yourself that question, can someone like you be forgiven for your sins?

The answer is yes, because God the Son has secured justification. Can someone like you be a child of God?

God the Son, a child of God? Yes, you can, because God the Son has secured adoption. And can someone like you really make it to heaven?

Can someone like me really make it to heaven? The amazing truth is yes, because God the Son has secured our inheritance.

[33 : 36] everything that we have is all because of what He has secured for us. And just to confirm your security, and just to stamp your assurance upon your heart, God the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in you as a guarantee.

We are told this in the amazing words of Ephesians 1.13. In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.

So if you are a Christian, or if you become a Christian, what is the guarantee that you are now safe or that you will be safe if you come to faith?

What's the guarantee? Is it that your faith is strong? Is it that you've had some amazing experience that you can tell people in giving your testimony?

Is it that you have visible changes in your life, that you do things now that you didn't do before? Is it because you become a better person? No. It's none of these things because we are not the ones who do the guaranteeing.

[35 : 04] The guaranteeing of your salvation is done by God, the Holy Spirit, Himself. And that's why, as a Christian, you are safe forever because God, the Holy Spirit, says, I guarantee it.

There is so much more that we could say here. The key point I hope we are seeing is the fact that the work of salvation is a shared work.

When it comes to the plan of salvation, the Father initiates, the Son accomplishes, and the Holy Spirit applies. When it comes to the work of salvation, the Father sends, the Son comes, and the Spirit remains.

And when it comes to receiving salvation, the Father promises, the Son secures, and the Spirit guarantees. Salvation is a shared work between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

And what a perfect work it is. What a perfect work it is. But all that leaves us with one final question.

[36 : 44] Who is all that work for? You. Thanks be to God.