

The Trinity Revealed

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[0 : 00] Good evening, everybody. I'm glad to be with you. May we pray before we do anything else. Holy Father, we are going to explore your revealed truth tonight.

Send your Holy Spirit, we pray. Give us understanding. Give us joy in your truth. Give us strength from your truth.

And so prepare us to be your witnesses in this world, today, tomorrow, and on as long as life shall last.

Grant it in Jesus' name, we pray. Amen. I'm speaking to order tonight. Let me make that perfectly plain.

I was given my title, The Trinity Revealed. It's a very good title, actually, for what I'm going to share.

[1 : 16] It directs us to the scriptures where our God is revealed in all his glory. But then this is announced as a lecture, and that makes it a little different from a sermon.

Do you know the difference between a lecture and a sermon? Well, I attempt both, and I'm very conscious of the difference. Let me tell you what it is.

A sermon is a venture in letting the text, or a text from the Word of God, speak its message through you.

And the purpose of that is to change hearts and lives and help people to become what they have never yet been through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A lecture is something less than that. In a lecture, you have a teacher, a would-be teacher, trying to explain something.

[2 : 35] And his purpose is to clear the head and sort out people's thinking. Now, I am committed to give you a lecture tonight.

But I'm a preacher in my heart, I confess it. And if I slip into the preaching mode, well, I shan't be surprised.

And I urge you not to be surprised either. If God visits us, it will happen.

Let's see what does happen. Here am I, a teacher, called to explain, as in lectures one does.

What am I supposed to be explaining? The word Trinity is given. But the word Trinity isn't a word which any of us understands well.

[3 : 42] And we shall see reasons for that as I go on. Suffice it then to say, in ordinary Christian language, that I'm seeking to explain what every Christian lecture and every Christian sermon sets itself to explain.

That is, something of importance about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is the central focus in all that I'm going to say tonight, as I think will become obvious in a minute or two.

And what we're going to see tonight is not the Lord Jesus Christ in isolation.

Often in our Christian preaching, we do present our Lord Jesus Christ in isolation. I mean, we begin by talking about our lostness as sinful human beings, and about our Lord Jesus as the one and only Savior.

And in place, that's perfectly right. But what I'm going to do tonight, what my title requires me to do, is to talk about the Lord Jesus, not in isolation, but in his togetherness.

[5 : 30] His togetherness with the Father and the Holy Spirit. His togetherness with the Father, it was witnessed to when there came a voice from heaven heard by John the Baptist when he baptized Jesus.

The voice said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased. And those same words came, as a voice from heaven once more, to the three disciples who were with the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. This togetherness is basic, as we shall see, to the way that the New Testament presents our Lord Jesus.

He is the Son of the Father, and in all his saving ministry, first to last, he is fulfilling his Father's will. And the New Testament also bears witness to his togetherness with the Holy Spirit.

And that becomes particularly clear when in his farewell discourse to his disciples, recorded in John chapters 14, 15, and 16, he talks about the Holy Spirit as the one whom he and the Father are going to send to them.

[7 : 17] And, says the Lord Jesus, he, the Holy Spirit, will come as another paraclete. That's the Greek word, paraclete, and it means more than any single English word can express.

And I expect you've heard many sermons which have gone to town on that thought. A paraclete is a helper, a counselor, an encourager, a supporter, an advocate.

All those thoughts are gathered together in the one word. And, says the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit is coming to be another paraclete.

Another? Yes, because the Lord Jesus himself, of course, was the original paraclete. And he fulfilled all those ministries that I just referred to in his own person.

And he says, now that I'm going to leave you, I'm going to send you a second paraclete. Someone who will match in his ministry what I have been sharing with you in my ministry.

[8 : 43] So, here once again is togetherness. Jesus sending the Spirit to continue, carry and carry on his own ministry to his disciples.

That's the togetherness that we're going to explore tonight. The Lord Jesus, Son of the Father, Sender of the Spirit, and those three divine persons are always together, as we shall see.

And, the truth of the Trinity is the truth that explores and expresses that fact. God, unique, as indeed he is, there's none like him, there's none like him, he is three persons in a single life, or putting it the other way around, he is one God whose life is expressed in and by three persons in relation to each other, but drawing on that single life, which is the life of God.

Three in one and one in three. And the three are always together. That becomes apparent as we read the New Testament.

And, there is a single, standard, unchanging, cooperative relationship between the three of them, such that it's the Father who plans, the Son then obeys what the Father has planned for him, and the Spirit fulfills what the Father has decided and what the Son has agreed shall be done.

[11 : 20] That's the simplest way of putting it, and I hope that just by saying that, I begin to give you an idea that you can, shall I say, manage as distinct from simply goggling at and feeling lost about.

Three persons, one life, three in relation with each other in a way that never changes, and the three working together in a common pattern of cooperation.

I say it again, the Father leads, plans, is in charge, if one may put it that way, the Son obeys what the Father has planned for him, and the Spirit fulfills the action which the Father has planned that the three shall be involved in.

God is both singular and plural, but I can say that now to you, I hope, with clarity of understanding on your part as to what I'm saying.

I put it that way because we can't get any further. After all, we are creatures, God is God, you would expect that there would be more in God than his creatures can understand, and so indeed there is.

[13 : 05] How the three live together sharing the common life that they do, how the three maintain their cooperative relationship throughout everything that God does, these are things beyond our understanding.

But, at least, having said what I've said, I hope I've given you what I would call a sketch of what the truth of the Trinity is all about.

And you see why it is that the Church constantly speaks of God doing what he does in his character as the Father working through the Son, through what the Lord Jesus does, and through the Holy Spirit, through what the Spirit does.

Yes, it's mystery beyond our imagining, beyond our understanding, but the Lord Jesus himself clearly regarded it as basic, and that comes out, you know, right at the end of Matthew's Gospel, where the risen Lord gives his disciples their marching orders.

Go, he says, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them. He thinks that important. baptizing them in the name, now it's singular, name, not names, although three names are now going to be given, but no, it's a single name.

[15 : 04] A modern theologian has called it the Christian name of God, which is witchy and wise, I think. The name is the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Three persons, yes, but one name, because we are talking, Jesus is talking of one God. Of course, we still baptize in the name, singular, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the three persons who together are the one God.

Now, I said, this is beyond our understanding, and you mustn't suppose that because I am doing what the lecturer tries to do, and explaining the matter as best I can, that therefore I think that I understand it.

No, just like you, I don't understand it either. But I read my Bible, I seek to put together the things that the Bible shows me and says, and it's from the Bible that I draw what I've been saying in these last few minutes.

Now, you know what happens when we try to teach the Trinity in Sunday schools and Bible classes and from the pulpit, we use illustrations.

[16 : 47] That's a very reasonable, natural thing for us to do. That's a regular method of teaching anything. You say, well, you don't understand it?

Look, it's like this, and we give an illustration. But now I have to tell you that the illustrations that we regularly give when we try to teach the Trinity to each other are bad illustrations.

Yes, they really are. I think of two in particular, and I'm sure they're very familiar to all of us. There's the cloverleaf.

We explain to people, though, in the cloverleaf, there are three little cloverleaves joined together, making one cloverleaf.

And then we talk to each other about water. Water, we say, is a single reality, H₂O, but it has three forms.

[17 : 56] There's ordinary water, and there's ice, which is what you get when it freezes, and there's steam, which is what you get when water is heated.

But neither of those illustrations deals with the fact that there are three persons in this reality of the Trinity, the Trinitarian life of God, and that's what makes them bad illustrations.

the thing that's really central is being left out. So what do we do? Well, what I'm going to do, I'm taking a risk here.

You'll have to tell me afterwards if you don't think the risk was worth taking, but this is the risk I'm going to take.

I have three illustrations of the Trinity which I'm going to use to bring into focus the three things I want to share with you about the Trinity.

[19 : 11] I'm sure my illustrations are bad also, because none of them, I'll tell you now, illustrates the central fact that the three persons are sharers in a common life, and so they constitute one God, one God in three persons, but one God, not three.

but then the Trinity is a unique fact that I don't think there can be such a thing as a good illustration. So, I'm going to share with you my three bad ones in making the three points about the Trinity that I do want to make. They're really, how do I say this, survey points.

And having said that, I'll begin to make them. Point one, the Trinity and God's world. You know how the Bible begins.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and the Spirit of God was brooding over the face of the waters.

[20 : 39] The Spirit of God then was involved there. that's the first two verses of the book Genesis. And that isn't the whole story because in the scripture that opens, the passage that opens John's gospel, some of which was read to us tonight, you know how it starts.

In the beginning was the word. We're going to have the word identified as the Son of God later on in this passage.

But John starts by introducing this thought of the word. And that Greek term, let me tell you at once, signifies thought, meaning, purpose, and everything associated with thinking and purposing and acting in conscious, with a conscious intention to produce a certain result or to solve a certain problem.

In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, okay, then God is plural, here you have two persons, the word was with God, and the word was God.

That is, both persons have the same character and the same description, and both of them are rightly called God.

[22 : 20] The word was, John continues, in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, without him was not anything made that was made.

And so it goes on. Well, what we have there is an addition to the thought we have at the beginning of Genesis, and here you have God, the creator, and the word, his agent in creation, and the spirit, his power fulfilling the creational plan.

Why did God create? He didn't need the universe. His purpose in creation was quite simply love. In 1 John 4 and verse 8, it says, God is love. love. That word love, agape in the Greek, expresses the thought of an active attitude that's committed to make people and things good and great. God sought what I may call an overflow of his love in a world that didn't exist until he called it into being.

[24 : 05] But that's what he did and that's why he did it. and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were all involved.

So, here is the first of my bad illustrations. God is like a family and his creation is like a family project.

We are part of that creation, of course, and the New Testament highlights the fact that it is quite specifically the Lord Jesus, the second of the three persons, who keeps creation going, keeps it in existence and in order.

He upholds all things by the word of his power. That's how it's expressed in Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 3. That, then, is his ongoing role in the family project.

And he does it, of course, at the will of the Father and through the agency of the Spirit whom he directs in the work that the Spirit does.

[25 : 37] All right. Now, a second thought. The Trinity and the plan of salvation. I suppose we all of us are familiar with the plan of salvation in its outline.

The Father appointed the Son to be the Redeemer and Savior of sinful mankind. Things went wrong at the human level in God's creation right at the beginning and the Father appointed the Son to be his agent, putting things straight.

God's salvation and that meant that the Son was committed to incarnation and then substitution for us under God's judgment on the cross and then resurrection from the dead to be the source of new spiritual life to us sinners.

Salvation is not only forgiveness its new life. And it means union between the Lord Jesus and ourselves.

The Holy Spirit, as it were, reaches out into our hearts and links us in a way that, again, we can't understand, but certainly we can be sure of and rejoice in.

[27 : 10] The Spirit links us with Jesus so that it's his resurrection life that flows into us. And that's the supernaturalizing of our natural lives which salvation involves.

And I trust that every single one of us in this church tonight knows something of it. When we put faith in the Lord Jesus as our sin-bearer and Savior, God then, as I say, he sends the Spirit into our hearts to unite us with himself and make us partakers of this resurrection life, which is his, which is eternal, and which will never cease for you and me.

the world, the cosmos, is all of it more or less disordered because of human sin.

Scripture says that. And there's a day coming when the Lord Jesus will return to this cosmos and remake it all, which again is something marvelous, something unimaginable, something for which we hope and look forward, but which we can't begin to conceive at this present time.

But this is the saving ministry which the Father entrusted to the Son and which the Lord Jesus fulfills through the help of the Spirit.

[29 : 00] and so you find Paul saying, I want to read you this because it's so impressive a statement. Paul says in Colossians chapter 1, writing to a church where the Lord Jesus ministry was being undervalued, Paul writes of Jesus the Son, by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether, now, here are the hierarchies of angels which the Colossians believed in, were talking about, whether Paul is endorsing their reality as he refers to them, nobody is quite sure, but he says, all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

That phrase, for him, carries lots of meaning. The Father always planned, still does intend, that the Lord Jesus shall be forever head of the universe, just like that.

But I want to go on reading. And he, that's the Lord Jesus, is before all things and in him all things hold together. That's the universe.

All things hold together. That's how it is that this church building stands firm. That's how it is that you and I continue in existence.

That's how it is that we're here, gathered, studying the word of God tonight. Jesus is holding us all in existence. And Paul continues, he is the head of the body, the church.

[31 : 13] The beginning, he's the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. and so it goes on.

I just wanted you to hear those words though because they are tremendously significant as pointers to the focus on Jesus and Jesus' ministry and Jesus' destiny which the New Testament wants us to have.

Time doesn't allow me to say any more about that but it does lead me to my second probably bad illustration. God then is like a team.

Think of a soccer team, a hockey team. The players move all around the field but the relationship between them, I mean the way that one is charged to mark another so that they operate as a team and not just a set of isolated individuals.

That's permanent, that stands, that's what they're trained and disciplined into and that's something which doesn't change as the games go on.

[32 : 41] God, I'm saying, is like a team in that sense that the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit remains constant whatever it is that the Holy Three are doing at any particular time.

But the Father is always operating through his Son and the Father and the Son together have an agenda for the Holy Spirit which he then fulfills.

And that brings me to thought number three, the Trinity and the Christian life, yours and mine. Have you ever heard it said, I'm sure that you have and it's perfectly proper to say it.

Knowing God is a matter of three perspectives, three directions, three relationships.

There's God above whom we worship. There's God beside us. That's specifically the Lord Jesus. he said that, you know, in the very last words of Matthew's gospel.

[34 : 13] Behold, he said, I am with you. He's talking to his own disciples. I am with you always, even to the end of the world.

With you always. With you and me then, always. Do we remember that on a day-to-day basis? Jesus with us always.

He is. Just as God is above us to be worshipped and praised always. That's the Father.

And there's God within us too. That's the Holy Spirit who, let's use the Bible word, indwells us. and, as I said, links us and keeps us linked with the Lord Jesus in his resurrection life.

So that we are, as I said, living supernatural lives. This is something that we need to be clear on, friends, for knowing that the Lord Jesus is with us, beside us, should bring us, and I trust does bring us, strength and love, love from Christ, which we then express towards each other and towards all the folk with whom we have relationships, and which we hope, which we seek to express in bringing others to the knowledge of Christ which we have ourselves.

[36 : 05] That's love in action. And it's from the Lord Jesus beside us that the prompting to do that comes.

And as for the indwelling Holy Spirit, he brings assurance and joy into our hearts, and those are qualities that we need, and as I said, they are qualities which the Holy Spirit bestows.

God is God is God is like a task force in our disordered and messed up lives.

Father, Son, and Spirit, all involved in making us different from, and, how can I say, gloriously better than we were in our fallenness.

The second form of the illustration, I hope this works, you must tell me afterwards, God is like a dance.

[37 : 34] I mean the sort of dance that they used to have going on at the balls that you see in period movies, 18th century, 19th century, balls with set dances where someone draws you into the dance as his partner, and then you need to know, because you then have to practice, set steps which you perform in partnership with him.

I'm treating us all as ladies for the moment in order to express this. You've seen these dances dances on movies, you know what I'm talking about, I'm sure.

Paul, in just one place, uses a verb which points, I think, in that direction, though I'm sure that Paul knew nothing about these dances, but in Galatians chapter 5 and verse 25, he says, if we live by the spirit, and we do, let us keep in step with the spirit.

That's what the Greek word literally means, though our N-E-V, sorry, our E-S-V, I'm trying to say, translates the verb simply as walk, but it means rather more than walk, keep in step with someone who is setting the step and the standard for you.

Well, this is my lecture. I hope it's brought a little light.

[39 : 44] None of us have more than a little light about the Trinity, in fact, I said that at the beginning, I'll say it, I say it again at the end, but this is scriptural light, and I hope that by saying these things, I have actually got you thrilled, which is what we should be, thrilled, at the way in which the Father planned our salvation, the Son came to earth, earth, and achieved salvation for us, and now the Father and the Son have sent the Holy Spirit to indwell us, and that means we're sharing a life that will never end, and that will become more and more glorious as we, shall I say, live into it with more praise, more thanks, more joy in

Jesus' company, and more trust in the empowering of the Holy Spirit for the life of service, ministry, to which we're all called.

I can't say any more tonight, I've probably gone over time as it is, have I? Yes, I think I have, but sorry about that, I said it as briefly as I could, but I did want to say this much, brothers and sisters, and now I want to lead you in prayer that the Lord himself will teach us these things at the deepest level.

Please, let's pray. Almighty Father, Lord Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Holy Trinity, hear us, we pray, that you will give us such light, as your word yields concerning your life together and your ministry together to us.

We have sought, I have sought, to spell this out as best I could, and we have sought together to think it out as best we can.

[42 : 27] God's God's God's love. Now, Lord, Father, Son, and Spirit, give us the understanding we need, give us the experience of divine life to which you've called us and for which you've saved us, and enable us to show forth that supernatural vitality, which is your gift to all your children, and which is the beginning of the eternal life that will go on beyond this world and never end.

We thank you for the hope set before us, and we thank you for the power made available to us right now. Lead us, Lord, into the experience of these things for your glory and for our blessing.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.