

Value the Trinity

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Date: 24 January 2016

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn to our Bibles to read this evening. As I said, Simon is going to be speaking not so much on a Bible passage, but on the doctrine, really, of the Trinity, the nature of our God.

We're going to read together some verses from Ephesians, the first chapter of all the letters of Ephesians, and you can have a visitor's Bible, you'll find it, I think, on page 976, and we'll read from verses 3 to 14 of Ephesians chapter 1.

So Paul the Apostle says, We have redemption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in heaven, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, and we have been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all the things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

[2 : 0 1] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, you also 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.

Amen. Well, these are indeed majestic words. Well, good evening, dear friends, and thank you again for the welcome you've given to Kathy and myself.

It's been an absolute treat to be at the Tron for this last week, and the days have been cold, but you have been warm. The days have been short. Your kindnesses have been long.

Your words have been incomprehensible. But you've meant well. We've had a great time.

And I said this morning, I hope you will continue to pray for your pastoral team, because the leadership of this church is a blessing beyond the Tron, and reaches down into the encouragements we've received down in Sydney.

[3 : 2 0] Now, William has prayed, and we've sung a prayer, so I'm just going to go straight to the task. And I want to begin by reminding you of an old story you may have heard of, of four men who are travelling in a small plane.

There's a pilot, a brilliant professor, a bishop, and a student. And as they're travelling, the engines fail, and the pilot radios back and says to the men in the plane, I'm sorry to tell you, the engines have failed, and we're going to have to bail out.

And because there's only three parachutes, and I own the plane and the parachutes, I'm taking one, and out he goes. And the brilliant professor then stands up and says to the other two, you know, I'm so intelligent.

We owe it to the world to keep me alive. So he said, I'm taking one as well, and out he goes. And the old bishop then stands up and says to the student, you know, young man, I've lived a long life.

I'm ready to meet my maker. I'd be very glad for you to take the last parachute. And the student says, well, sir, that won't be necessary. There are still two parachutes. And the bishop says, how could that be possible? There were only three. And the student says, the brilliant professor's just jumped out with my rucksack.

[4 : 27] And I tell you that because is it not interesting that there are things that sometimes look extremely relevant to us, like a rucksack, which are actually in the moment of very limited value.

And the thing that looks less relevant or irrelevant, like a parachute in the right moment, is of crucial value. And I want to suggest to you this evening that the doctrine of the Trinity, which is an unusual topic for a sermon, may look irrelevant and impractical, but actually it is of immeasurable value.

And by the Trinity I mean, of course, that there is one God, three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And I think I'm telling you the truth this evening when I tell you that the Trinity shows us what life is for.

And that the Trinity tells us how to get on with people. And that the Trinity tells us why Christ and the way of Christ is the only non-fiction religion in the world.

In the past, in history, everybody pretty well who went to church was familiar with the Trinity. So when Columbus sailed in 1492 and came across some lands that looked like three lands, and then he came closer and saw that they were really one, he named the place Trinidad, the Spanish word for Trinity, a good Catholic boy.

[6 : 02] And our forgetting of the Trinity, which we do so easily, because we tend to focus on the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit, but forget the Trinity, it's not as though we're losing something like an old antique, which we can really do without.

When we lose or forget the Trinity, it's a little bit more like spiritual dementia. Everything gets cloudier. And I thought it might be good this evening to say just a few things to get you thinking about the Trinity.

Maybe reading on the subject. One of the good books on your bookstore is called The Good God. It will pay the back, which will stimulate you and refresh you. And my hope is that you will begin to see that everything, everything, everything, everything, everything relates to the Trinity.

And that you won't fall into what is called deism, that some god has sort of wound the world up and walked away, which is becoming very popular. You know, there is a god, but he's distant.

Or you won't fall, on the other hand, into pantheism, that there's lots of random gods. This is also becoming very popular. But that you will celebrate Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[7 : 17] And even as you pray, even perhaps before you fall asleep, you might remember as you send up an end of day prayer, you might remember that you're speaking to the Father because of the Son with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Now, it's a topical subject which is not my favourite type of preaching and it's probably not your favourite either. I would rather be digging into one passage. But every now and again, there is a time for a topical talk.

And so I thought I would just spend a few minutes talking to you about the fact of the Trinity, then the importance of the Trinity, and then the necessity of the Trinity. First of all, the fact. We may feel a little defensive when we raise the subject of the Trinity.

And you can imagine if the Jehovah's Witnesses come to your door and say to you, as they may, you know, your religion is sort of very inventive, isn't it, coming up with this doctrine of the Trinity and we feel a little bit defensive.

Because it's not a Bible word. And there's no illustration which will really explain the Trinity and do justice. There's no human illustration. And a great deal of theology, if you ever read more meatily on the subject, is pretty negative, telling us what the Trinity isn't and all the dangers.

[8 : 31] But let me say this, and this is perhaps one of the two most important things to say to you this evening. You will be a Trinity person if you get Jesus. If you get Jesus, if you understand who He is, if you believe in Him and belong to Him and seek to behave for Him, you will be a Trinitarian person.

Because if you get your Bible and you start to read on the desert island from left to right, and you come to the part that tells you that there is one God, and then you keep reading, and you know there's only one God, and then you come to Jesus.

And suddenly you're face to face with somebody who is real and historical, who talks like God and acts like God, and you've got to make a decision that this person, Jesus, is God.

And you come to the point in the words of Philippians 2 where you kneel down before Him and you declare that He is Lord. Paul borrows the Yahweh word from Isaiah.

You declare that Jesus is Yahweh. To the glory of God the Father. And then of course you begin to read about the Holy Spirit, and you see that the Holy Spirit, according to Jesus, is a He, not an It.

[9 : 42] And that He does all sorts of things that people do. He guides, He grieves, He researches, He leads, He does all sorts of things that people do, personal things.

And you realize that there is one God and three persons. It is true that there is not the Trinity word in Scripture, but the Christmas word is not in Scripture either, yet we do believe in the Incarnation.

And the Easter word is not in Scripture, yet we do believe in the Resurrection. No, the word Trinity is not in Scripture, but the reality is in Scripture. And Jim Packer says in one of his essays that Trinity is the Christian name for God.

You might like to think about that when you're engaging in conversation with people. That by speaking about God and falling into the trap of what they think about God, you might rescue that conversation by talking about belief in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It's also true that there's no illustration that explains the Trinity. So people come up with sort of ice, water, steam, or a man who's a father, a son, and a builder, or the light, which has got sort of radiance and heat, or the three-leaf clover.

[11 : 07] All of these illustrations fail. I've noticed Gerald Bray in one of his books speaks about the atom which looks from the outside to be one, but of course inside is multiple.

But actually when he uses that illustration, he recognizes that that doesn't do justice to the Trinity. He's really teaching that outside Christianity, if you are outside Christianity, God looks like just one.

But when you enter into Christianity, you see that he's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I find the fact that none of these illustrations do justice to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit really very comforting.

Because it just reminds me again that this God who has confronted the world is not something that we have invented, but that he has come to us and forced us to face him.

So as somebody said, the doctrine of the Trinity is humbling, but it's not foolish. It's also true that theology is often guarding against various dangers. But again, this is very helpful to us because it's fencing away unhelpful ideas and just bringing us to the biblical reality that we're face to face with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[12 : 20] So when you do face up to Jesus in the New Testament by reading Mark's Gospel or John's Gospel or something like that, and you realize that Jesus is a historical person, he's a unique person, he's the supreme person, he's human, and he's God, he's the door to fellowship with the Father.

And he's the door to fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Once you have faith in Jesus, you immediately are a Trinitarian person. As soon as you put your faith in Jesus, that minute, you have a Father in Heaven, you have a Saviour, and you have the Holy Spirit indwelling.

You can't get the Trinity one by one. You can't believe in God one year and then Jesus the next and get the Holy Spirit the next. Relating to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit comes all together.

And I wonder whether that's why Paul, in 2 Corinthians 13-14, that famous grace verse, which we often finish meetings with, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, begins the free sin with the person of Jesus because he is the way in to the Trinity.

Well, this Trinity is hinted at in the Old Testament. You know, think of phrases like holy, holy, holy in Isaiah 6. But the Trinity is really very clear in the New Testament.

[13 : 40] So just remember, for example, in case you think, well, the Trinity is not very obvious to me. Think, for example, about when Jesus is being baptized and he walks into the water and the Father speaks publicly from heaven and the Holy Spirit descends on him as a dove would descend on him.

Or think about when Jesus is having a conversation with Nicodemus and he gets to the point of saying, you know, God so loved the world that he sent his Son and the Son must be lifted up and the person who believes in him will be reborn because the Spirit moves where he wills.

Or think also of the Last Supper where Jesus is sitting with the disciples and he says, in my Father's house are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you.

I won't leave you as orphans. I will come to you another council. Or think of Jesus' prayer in John 17 where he speaks to the Father.

He, the Son, speaks to the Father asking the Father to protect them and to look after them and to lead them. Or think about the commission in Matthew chapter 28.

[14 : 54] Go and make disciples in the name singular of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There are lots of texts which actually you could find the Trinity in the text.

And there are lots of passages like Ephesians chapter 1 which of course lay out the adopting, redeeming, sealing Trinity. So the Trinity is a fact and I don't want you to be nervous about the Trinity.

Declare the Trinity. It's absolutely wonderful. It will humble your listener. It may intrigue your listener. It will clarify who you're talking about. Now secondly, there is the importance of the Trinity.

Recently in our home we had a dinner just before we came away and our son has come away also and so we decided to have a family dinner and we sat around the table and one of our children decided that we would spend just a few minutes talking around the table and each one would say what they appreciated about each one around the table.

And it was quite a good corrective to our conversation around the table which is often sort of more jokey and not particularly flattering and yet we spent this time and some of them one of them had arranged for some very emotional music to be played in the background at the same time which made it all the more traumatic really.

[16 : 14] But there we were talking about one another and it was a very special time. Suddenly we realised what various members of the family thought.

Things that they would never express. Now I say this to you because how do you think of God? If you think of God badly you're probably not thinking of God biblically.

If you think of God feebly you're probably not thinking of Him biblically. The way we think of God has to match the reality.

Otherwise we dishonour Him. And also does it occur to you that we become like the thing we worship? So you know if we worship something which is little and dreadful we ourselves will shrivel and diminish.

That's why people are so sad in our streets. That's why your city and my city are marked by such shriveled people. Their horizon is so tiny and tragic.

[17 : 26] We become like the person we worship. And if we worship the Trinitarian God then we begin to expand and develop. And sometimes you have the privilege of watching people move like that.

Remember the psalmist says those who worship idols without the eyes without the ears without the mouths without the legs they become like them. But here's the very big issue and I hope you'll really grasp this again this evening or perhaps one or two of you for the first time.

The Trinity tells us how life works. The Trinity tells us how the universe runs. And I say this for this reason. I want you to just think in your mind back to when there was no creation.

Just imagine you could go back in your mind before God says let there be. and before God says let there be and the creation comes into being you've got the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Now what if you just got God not Father not Son not Holy Spirit just God. Who does he love?

[18 : 37] Well perhaps he loves himself. But then when the creation comes along he improves because he begins to love out with you.

Or perhaps you say well you know he doesn't love until the creation comes along. And then he begins to love us. In fact that's why he made us because he needs us.

But we know that's not true. No, God doesn't improve with creation. God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are pre-creation and perfect and loving for all eternity before creation.

And the Father is loving the Son and the Son is loving the Father. The Father is loving the Spirit. The Spirit is loving the Father. And they're serving each other and they're in perfection and they're joyful and they're harmonious and there's no friction and there's no inequality and there's no abuse.

everything is absolutely wonderful. And then because God is a loving God he creates. So you see a relationship is bigger and more significant and before the creation.

[19 : 59] And therefore the person who thinks that I am in the creation because I've got to go and get the creation whether it's a fourth house or just a fourth million or a fourth whatever that person has made a big mistake because in the end that's going to fail them.

If they throw their heart mind soul and strength into creation that creation is going to fail them. It is not the ultimate reality. The person who seeks relationship is going to find reality first with God through Christ second with his people and third a whole new relationship attitude with those who are lost.

And because God is loving at his core before the world began everything about him that he does is loving. Everything the Trinity does, everything the Father, Son and Holy Spirit do is loving.

So when he makes the creation he does it as a lover. And when you look at the creation even though it's fallen a lot of what you'll see around this beautiful city especially to do with the parks and the creation that God has made will say to you this has been done by a lover and you'll look at it with new eyes.

Or think of the way the Trinity works in Providence looking after you, balancing your troubles with your blessings. This is all being done by a lover.

[21 : 35] Father, Son and Holy Spirit are working out how to test and support you. Or think of how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit do your salvation. The Father adopting, the Son redeeming, the Holy Spirit giving rebirth.

This is all being done by a lover. Saying with revelation that God would reveal to us the cosmos and then reveal the Son and then by the Spirit illumine our eyes, spiritual eyes.

This is all being done by a lover. And even when God comes to judge, this will be done by a lover. You'll notice that a lot of the papers have letters, at least they do in our city and I think in yours from what I've read in the last few weeks, which get angry with God.

But the God that they're angry with is not the beautiful God of the Trinity. It's normally some sort of half-baked caricature. We had a lady in charge of the religious affairs of the Sydney Morning Herald and she was so prejudiced against everything to do with Christianity.

She just got it wrong every time. Eventually I wrote to the letter and I said, you know, this is a piece of genius getting this lady to be in charge of religious affairs.

[22 : 50] Now you just need somebody blind to do all your art reporting and somebody dead to do all your music reporting. And she rang me from her office and she said, what did you like about my music reporting?

I said, I'm sorry, let's believe we're on the right way please. I'm just a simple pastor saying that as you write on Christian affairs, you either don't have the faculties to understand them or you don't have the willingness to interpret them.

And I'd be very glad to come and have lunch with you and explain Christianity to you. But of course there was no great interest in that. So there is the need of the, there is the fact of the Trinity and the need of the Trinity and the third thing this evening I want to talk to you about.

Did I just get that wrong? I did. I said the fact of the Trinity, the importance of the Trinity and now the need of the Trinity. The need of the Trinity. And I say this to you because Jim Packer says in one of his articles a very helpful sentence.

He says, you cannot state the gospel rightly if you grasp the Godhead wrongly. You cannot state the gospel rightly if you grasp the Godhead wrongly.

[24 : 03] And in that little book downstairs which is sometimes called Enjoying the Trinity or sometimes called The Good God by Michael Reeves. He asks this question, is it possible that in our culture today, the Western world, there is the diminishing of understanding of the Trinity and a rising of hostility against some other God?

I think that's a very interesting question. Are the two of them going hand in hand? If we do have a good grasp of the Trinity, including relationships as the key to life, I think this will set many people free from the pursuit of materialism and the great loneliness.

I watch some of the men and the women in our church and they haven't yet seen the attractiveness of Jesus Christ. They haven't yet seen the treasure in the field. They haven't yet seen the pearl of great price.

So they're just going for what they do see. And it's just not working. And it's affecting their homes. But a good grasp of the Trinity would set many people free.

A good grasp of the Trinity, including relationships, would help many marriages. Because suddenly a man would see that he can serve his wife without diminishing himself in any way, because the son is able to submit to the father without receiving any inequality or anything which is embarrassing, or degrading, but wonderful.

[25 : 37] And the domestic violence in our city and probably in yours is escalating. And we've lost the whole concept of joyful submission and loving leadership.

And it's all modeled for us beautifully in the Trinity. And it should spill over into the churches and be a testimony to the wider world. So a good grasp of the Trinity would perhaps help in many homes.

A good grasp of the Trinity would also help our discussions with non-Christian people on difficult issues. You know, think of the difficult discussion of same-sex marriage.

How difficult it is to get into the discussion. You find yourself on the back foot. But just imagine that we were talking not so much about what we were against as what we were so grateful for.

Imagine if the world heard us talking about the absolute privilege of knowing God the Father, Jesus the Saviour, the Holy Spirit the Comforter. And they heard us saying we are so grateful for this relationship that we wouldn't want anyone else to miss out.

[26 : 45] And that might translate into don't go that direction, go this direction, with very good reason. A good grasp of the Trinity might also lead us to a better witness.

As I say, we may be talking to people who discover that they are angry with the God who they ought to be angry with. But they would not want to reject the love of the Father, the redemption of the Son, the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

And maybe we owe it to our friends to help them enter a little more into the reaches of the Trinity. Now, most of you will know the name Thomas Chalmers, because there's a great statue to hear in Edinburgh.

Was he a pastor in this church, at the Tron? The original Tron. So the second most famous pastor that this church has ever had.

And you probably know that Thomas Chalmers, a great man, was a clergyman who had no interest really in gospel things, even when he was in the ministry. And then he got very sick.

[27 : 55] And when he was sick, he went to bed with some good books. And he emerged from his sick bed a transformed man. And he was so zealous for the gospel that in the original Tron, they sometimes had to feed him in the window, because there were so many people waiting to listen to him.

And he said a very wonderful thing, which he'll have perhaps heard many times. And he said this, he said, don't try and talk your pagan friends out of their pleasure, or out of their plenty, because that's all they can see.

Show them something of the beauty of Christ. Help them to have a new affection, because the new affection will expel the old affection. And maybe as we think more carefully about the Trinity, and see the hand of the three persons on all the aspects of the world, and salvation, and promise, and the kingdom, and revelation, and church, and home, and work, we'll begin to feel and maybe express the great privilege and joy that it is for now Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So there's just a little introduction to the subject. You might like to think more carefully and read more carefully. Let's pray. Thank you. Our gracious God, we thank you for revealing yourself as one God, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And we pray that you would save us from having poor views of yourself, of being diminished in heart, because of idolatry. we pray that you would save us from having a faulty direction in the way we live.

[29 : 51] We pray that you would save us from having a cheap gospel in the way we speak. And we pray that in your great love and power you continue to teach us that we would see more clearly, love more dearly, and follow more nearly.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.