

Our Triune God (Matthew 28:16-20)

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- [0:00] Okay, all right, okay, let's pull it in. 1935, what might have been happening in the world at the time?! That was like so long ago, right?! Okay, all right, something about Hitler?
- Okay, all right, yeah, okay, good. Yeah, anyone? Okay, basically friends on the money, all right, the year is 1935, and in this year, not Hitler, but this guy, all right, his name's Henry, but in German it's Heinrich, he writes to a growing group of young, politically successful Germans, and he writes this, he says, we believe in a God almighty who stands above us.
- He created the earth, the fatherland, and the common people, and he has sent us the Fuhrer, Adolf Hitler. Any human being who doesn't believe in God should be considered arrogant, crazy, and stupid, basically, my translation.
- Hmm, interesting, hey. How can someone, you know, who's part of, you know, Nazi Germany, part of some of the worst evil, see in the world?
- How can they be so happy to believe in God as well? The context, of course, right? He's part of a crew, a team of soldiers and leaders who are, you know, all, you know, worshipping in a sense, this guy, Adolf Hitler, but they actually believed in God in a sense.
- [1:55] They were pushing this idea, you should be God-believing, right, but without belonging to a church. So, I mean, one of the horrors of, you know, what happened in the Second World War was this kind of push of, we need this idea of God, but not the church.
- We may not be living in World War II or III today, yet I think we live in an age where all kinds of people use God's name, right? Invoke His name for good and not so good.
- I mean, think about our country. How does our national anthem start? Good. God of nations at thy feet. Okay. Sounds okay. If you're a U.S. president, you're going to swear on the Bible, you're going to claim in God we trust.
- If you're a pop star, if you are, you know, a celebrity athlete, you're going to praise God when you accept awards or raise trophies.
- I mean, if you're a stand-up comic these days, it's fun to make fun of God, so everyone's turning God into a punchline these days. And tragically, right, you know, even terrorists, even people who commit atrocities today, they often invoke God's name to do it.
- [3:12] It's one thing to say we believe in God, isn't it? Who is this God? What's this God like? How do I even get to know this God and not some other God that someone else has imagined up or that I've imagined up?
- That's kind of the question behind, you know, when we ask, what's the Trinity? Who is God? Why on earth make a statement in our church, you know, statement of faith about God?
- I get it. It's Sunday afternoon. This may or may not be your top priority question to answer right now. Who is God? Let me suggest to you, though, that the Bible makes this a top priority for us.
- And you and I, we need to give a good answer. Last week, we heard how our God speaks through the Holy Bible, right? And this week, we go to our second statement of faith.

We're invited to know and worship our triune God. Christians and churches throughout the past 2,000 years have come with lots of different ways to kind of express this key truth, right?

[4:17] So we've got some visitors from APMC, and so they will have a slightly different way of saying the same thing that we believe as a church. This is how our church's statement of faith defines who is God.

It reads this, that there is only one God, and in the Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, equal in every divine essence and glory.

Again, behind this statement is the question that you and I need to be asking, if you haven't already been thinking about it. Who is God? What's he like?

How do I get to know him? In fact, every world faith, every religious movement has a kind of answer, right, to this question. If you're an atheist, you might proclaim, God is a delusion, right?

Just go live your life without him. If you grew up in a Muslim family, you might be taught, God, he's just focused only on himself. That's what Allah is like, right?

[5:18] And so we come to him. The Bible, though, teaches there is one God in three persons. What that means is that the Father is God, as we see in the Bible, the Son, Jesus, is God, the Holy Spirit is God.

And yet, though there are three persons equally God, worthy of our worship, there is one God, not three. Are you following me? Okay.

Some of you are thinking, wow, that was a really difficult math question. I wasn't ready for. Christians proclaim there is one God, one name we worship. Yet the Father is not the Son.

Okay? Don't confuse the two. The Son is not the Holy Spirit. We don't confuse those two. The Bible doesn't teach that there are three gods. It teaches there's one God revealed in three persons.

That word persons is really important. Christians through the ages have had to come up with a very special way to sum up this key belief, what the Bible seems to teach about God.

[6:20] Our God is not a trio. He's not a unity, like a one thing. No, he's one God, three persons. And so we've come with the term Trinity to express who God is.

I mean, we try to make sense of that line, right? That there is one God, the Godhead in which there are three persons. Sounds as fun as the last question on your maths exam. Here's a triangle solved for X.

But I want to, instead of saying how hard this is, I want us to think for a moment, for a couple moments, how beautiful the Trinity, our triune God, is.

Now listen to Gary Miller. He's going to explain a small quote. It may seem strange now, but actually for the first 400 years of the church, sorry, wrong person on the screen, more energy was poured into working out the right beliefs about the Trinity than anything else.

Knowing God is at the heart of the Christian life. And so knowing what God is like, how he works, really is very important. To know God is to meet the Trinity. Have you ever thought about that?

[7:29] To know God is to meet the Trinity. In fact, go back to our Bible verse of the month, the one that our friend really helpfully read out for us. You notice, right, what does it say?

Baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Did you notice it didn't say, baptize them in the name of the Father, who is the Son, who is the Spirit.

No. It's not like God puts on different clothes, you know, when he goes to work, or when he goes to church, or when he goes to school. Right? We don't believe that. That's called modalism. Notice again that phrase, in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, doesn't say the names of, I don't know, Big Daddy, Brother Jesus, and Holy Spirit, as if they were three flatmates, you know, living in a shack.

That era is called tritheism. Read it again. Name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. It doesn't say, it's not the name of God, and you say the sinner's prayer to Jesus, but wait till you really experience the Holy Spirit.

Right? There we start to put the persons out of balance, right? And you can do it all kinds of different ways. But that kind of era is the era of subordination. You're kind of putting one person above the other, or the other.

[8 : 48] At PCBC, at any true Christian community, we'll go back to that statement of faith again. We baptize every believer in the one name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Because it is our triune God who speaks through the scriptures. Our triune God who saves you and me. Who loves us, who empowers us, welcomes us into the very heart of the truest family the world has ever seen.

There's only one God, and in the Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, equal in every divine essence and glory. And actually, right from the first pages of our Holy Bible, we meet this triune God.

I'll kind of quote them, and I'll put the scriptures up, but you can kind of follow along as well. You look at Genesis 1, 1 to 2. Notice it says, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But notice who?

Who was hovering over the waters? The Spirit of God. We'll flip to John 1, 1. And when the Apostle John reflects on the same creation story, he says something even more profound.

[9 : 56] He says, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was of the God, and the Word was God. Who's this Word? It's Jesus. God, the Son.

Can you see? Here, and in many, many other scriptures, through the Bible, our God speaks of himself as Trinity. You have the Father of light, give of every good gift.

You have the Son who was with him in the beginning. You have the Spirit of God hovering over the world when it was just watery waste, when it was empty and void. God was there, one in three, equal in power, essence, and glory.

Glenn Scrivener, he's someone who has done a wonderful job of making our triune God front and center. You can look up his video later on, so I'll post a link maybe in our group chat later on.

But when he shares the gospel, he reminds us to think, remember, that actually there's three, two, and one things you need to know. So three, God is a loving union of three.

[11 : 06] So if you want to picture who God is, think lovely union of three. Imagine that there's the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Three persons united in a loving union.

And then he says two, the world is shaped by two representatives. There's Adam, right? Represents our first parents, represents us in our sinful state.

But then we fall into his category when we sin, when we do wrong. And then there's the second Adam, right? Jesus. He lived the life that we should live.

On the cross, he died the death we should die. On Easter Sunday, he rose again to new life. So three, God is one in three. And then two representatives. And then we have one choice.

Either we are one with Adam or we're one with Jesus. Can you see that, right? It's a really easy way to get to grips with the story of the Bible, the story of who you and I are.

[12:06] Either we can be forever connected to Adam and our sin and death, or we connect with Jesus and we are forever connected to the family of God.

And together we know Jesus' Father as our Father. We know his Spirit as our Spirit. His future becomes our future. Do you believe this? It's what we call the Gospel.

And so, as Glenn Scrivener kind of summarizes it, this is a wonderful picture that you and I need. This is who God is.

God in three persons saving you and me. In fact, that little graphic there kind of has a wonderful picture or depiction of a scene that some of you might remember from Matthew's Gospel.

Let me read out Matthew chapter 3, verse 16 to 17. So, you can flick there in your Bibles or you can just listen in as well, right? Remember the scene? As soon as Jesus, he was baptized, right?

[13:06] So, he had his own baptism ceremony. He went up out of the water. This was at the start of his kind of public teaching ministry. And at that moment, heaven was opened up.

He saw the Spirit of God descending on him like a dove. And then a voice, a father speaks. My son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased.

Can you see this picture, right? This is what God is like. This is who God is like. He's a dad who speaks. There's the honored son.

The hovering spirit. This is our triune God. Praise him. What's interesting from this account of Matthew, specifically, is that you notice something interesting, right?

Because in here, we get a glimpse that each member of the Trinity, person of the Godhead, plays a different part, right? In the story. Right?

[14:05] Think about your family, right? You're part of one family, but each person in your family plays a different role. In the family of God, there is unity. See, everyone is equal in worth and divinity.

But then there's difference, right? So each member of the Godhead, well, may play slightly different roles. And while there's a time and place, right, far longer than a short term like this, for spending energy thinking about whether these differences are within, from what they do or who they are, it can get very philosophical.

What you and I just need to hold on to, right, just to hit the nail on the head, is this. Our triune God is only worth explaining, defending, if you and I will delight in him afterwards.

Right? Some of us, you know, we really like kind of, we're really logical people. We want to work out the mystery of the Trinity. Can I suggest to you, once you've worked it out, will you worship him?

If God is Trinity doesn't shape your view of, you know, of God and life and doesn't change you, then why bother putting it in a statement of faith?

[15:18] And so I want to close, right, by briefly sketching out three reasons, make you three suggestions, why it matters that you and I hold fast to the Trinity and delight in our triune God.

Why does our second statement of faith matter? Let me give you three reasons. Reason one, only our triune God can guide us to true unity and diversity.

Only our triune God can guide us to true unity and diversity. Right? Think about it. Well, we are a church and you can guess it, right?

And you know it. We are in a church that is changing significantly. And we can do all the surveys we want. We can chat with as many people as we want.

There are strong feelings about where we go next as a church on more than one issue. How will unity come through? Is it going to come through everyone deciding that we all need to learn Cantonese?

- [16:21] I'm not sure. Will it come through by everyone agreeing that everyone should just show up and come to English service and then we'll all be united? That doesn't work either, does it?

Only our triune God can guide us, give us a picture of what true unity and diversity looks like. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul writes to a very divided church too.

They're divided on all kinds of issues, right? Who preaches? Who has spiritual gifts? Who's powerful? Paul reminds them though, at the very start of that chapter, to remember what they once were.

Followers of mute idols before they came to the living God. And then he says, remember who's at work. 1 Corinthians 12 verse 4, he says, remember we worship the same spirit.

We follow the same Lord. We have the same God and Father. Do you see what Paul just did when he said that? He's appealing to the Trinity. He's saying, look here Corinthians.

- [17:22] Look church. Our unity is not in our skin color or what our passport says or how well you know your English. Our unity is in the gospel of our glorious triune God.

It can only be from there. And he can give us unity amidst our diversity. Think about that.

Only our triune God can guide us to true unity and diversity. If you want the best expression of what it looks like to be united and diverse, we have to go to the God who is made known to us in the scriptures.

God in three persons, our blessed Trinity. Second suggestion that the Trinity matters for you and me. Only our triune God can guard us from spiritual heresy.

I'll cover this one very briefly, but actually there's so much to be said here, isn't there? I've been reading Galatians in my quiet times. Galatians 4 verse 6, which I hit earlier this week.

- [18:22] It says, God the Father sent forth the spirit of his Son into our hearts. Again, do you notice what Paul's doing? He's talking about God as Trinity, right?

And why is Paul saying this though? Who remembers the story of the Galatian church? Okay. Were they a good church or a bad church? Were they a church that had problems or a church that had no problems?

Problems, okay? All right. Actually, Galatians chapter 3, Paul says, Oh, foolish Galatians, who's bewitched you? All right. That's not the kind of thing you say to a problem-free church.

So that's, he invokes the Trinity. He calls upon the triune God in order to say, Stop. You know, don't go back to those feasts. Don't go all those rules and works of the flesh to save yourself.

Go back to Jesus alone for your life. Only a triune God can guard us from that kind of disaster, turning to false worship, turning to cults, groups that cannot save you.

- [19:26] Look, every cult, every high control group, every organization that denies or distorts the essence and glory of the Father, Son, and Spirit, right?

They get the Trinity wrong, somewhere down the line. Some of you know that I've had interactions with people who have fallen to a group like Xin Chongji, right?

All kinds of issues with a cult like that. But at the very heart of it, they don't believe Jesus is divine. Adolf Hitler didn't accept that Jesus was God.

Cults today make similar errors, right? Have you ever met a Jehovah's Witness? They'll talk about God as Jehovah, but then they deny that Jesus is God.

They'll deny that the Holy Spirit is God. It's just a force of Jehovah. Mormons in their scriptures teach that God, Jesus, and the Spirit, they're three gods from stars like Kolob.

[20:22] A whole range of extreme churches will push you to try and believe that actually, you know, yeah, Jesus saved us, but it's really only the Holy Spirit that can really affect and change your life.

And no focus at all on our Father in heaven either. Every Christian runs the risk of functionally or actually denying or distorting the triune God.

Because we're sinful. We want to make a God for ourselves often. We want a God that we can put in a box. But don't be misled. Only our triune God can guard us from spiritual heresy.

You need every person of God in your salvation. Okay? Try and remember that. The Father chose you. The Son saved you. The Spirit sealed you.

That's what Ephesians 1 reminds us of. You need every person of God in your ongoing life journey as a Christian. You need the love of the Father to keep going.

[21:25] You need to be united with Christ to keep going. You need the fruit of the Spirit working in your heart to keep going. Don't believe the lies.

Don't believe the false destructive teachings. They show up in well-produced recordings and videos. Trusted endorsements from people that might love you or might be very charismatic. Don't be deceived.

Any group book teaching that ignores one member of the Godhead or elevates another or pushes the glory of someone in the Godhead away from what the Bible says, don't endorse it.

Step away from it. Run from it. Finally, third reason that the Trinity matters for you and me. Only our triune God can give us the ultimate family.

Turn with me to John chapter 17 if you have it in front of you. Otherwise, hopefully it will come up on the screen or I'll read it out for you. John 17.

[22:28] This is Jesus with the disciples. He's in the midst of an intense, very personal conversation. You notice what he says.

He looks to heaven. He prays, Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son that your Son may glorify you. Verse 5 again. Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Who talks like that? I need someone who is so intimately connected. If I asked you, well, we chatted with each other before, how well do you know the person beside you?

Look at the person next to you. Don't make it too awkward. Have a think. Everyone's on the spectrum in terms of how well you know them. Someone could be a total stranger. Some weird looks have been given right now.

Maybe the person next to you is a total stranger. Not sure who they are. Or other extreme. Maybe they're your best friend who knows all your secrets.

[23:33] Look at Jesus. In fact, let me read again. Further on in chapter 17, he prays, I've made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

That kind of intimate speak comes out of the triune God because Jesus in himself is so deeply known and loved within the Trinity.

So the good news is this. If you are in a family situation or if you are just in a situation where you don't feel like you have ultimate love, when you unite in faith to our triune God, you go from total stranger to the closest, deepest love you've ever known.

So encouraged. We're doing some baptism interviews. And one person last night said, that's what it's like to know God, to know Jesus for them. So encouraged when I heard that. Is that you?

Right? Unite in faith to our triune God. You go from total stranger to the most intimate, close relationship to the God of the universe. It's like you join a divine dance of love and community.

[24 : 49] Right? Because God in his essence knows true love and community. He's a Trinity. And when you join in, you join in with the deepest, truest love you've ever known.

Isn't that what everyone wants in this world? To be fully known and fully loved? Isn't that what you want? Isn't that what your neighbor wants? Your friend at work?

And the triune God gives us this true love. So if you want to make sure you're not worshipping a God of your own fiction, but the true God who speaks, who says, who invites us into a loving community, if you want to be part of a forever family that has no more hurt or conflict or pain, if you want to be fully known, fully loved, within eternal, unchanging love, then it starts by believing without shame, without fail, cherishing that there is only one God.

And in the Godhead, there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, equal in every divine essence and glory. Shall we pray?

Lord, help us not to see the Trinity as a puzzle to be solved, but as a relationship to delight in.

[26 : 16] Lord, forgive us when we have kind of put knowing you in the too hard basket. May today be a day where we recommit our lives to knowing and loving you, Lord.

Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit, we praise you. We want to respond in song and continuing to praise you. Praise you as who you are. The God of love.

The God who saves. The God who is one in three. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.