

What Is the Trinity?

What Does the Bible Teach?

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sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Sunday, January 26, 2014

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As we come to the word this morning we are continuing a series on what we teach as a body of believers, we're in the process of transitioning from a loose fellowship to a New Testament church. And part of the way that you do that is that you establish clear lines of teaching, you establish clearly what it is that the doctrine that you believe. It's not enough for Christians to simply loosely gather together and go on their own way, we have to understand that part of our responsibility, part of our privilege and part of our prerogative is that there is a body of truth that has been entrusted to the people of God, and we have the joy and the privilege and the responsibility to teach that truth to proclaim it, to defend it, to assert it with everything that we can do.

And what we're doing over these past couple of weeks and into the next month or two is that we're examining the doctrinal commitments of what we're going to be as a church. And I don't know about you, but what I have felt and what I have been impressed with over the past couple of weeks with the content is just the great magnitude of what it is that we believe. Things that so far transcend our individual lives, our individual circumstances.

Two weeks ago we dealt with a very basic question, "On what basis do we receive the Bible as the written word of God? Why do we receive that as truth?" And we realize that the answer to that question completely transcends what my opinion is or what yours is. We receive the scriptures on the testimony of Jesus Christ himself, the eternal son of God has born witness to the truth and accuracy of God's word, and there is no disputing with Him, because he is the highest and greatest authority in the universe. There's no one that you go to beyond Christ to establish what is true.

Last week we answered the question in preliminary detail, I guess, "Who is God?" And we saw just the immensity of God transcending us in every conceivable way, He is an immense eternal spirit who is the creator of heaven and earth by His spoken word, He is great in His omniscience, omnipresence, and His omnipotence, and He good in His love and in His truth and in His holiness. And these are themes that are woven throughout scripture and when they are called to our attention they just reverberate in our minds and humble us. And beloved, what I want you to see is that that is the effect that the truth of the word of God should have upon us. Rather than preaching and the Bible simply being

a crutch upon which we lean to get through life day by day, as if the Bible were a man-centered book that was designed for our good and the proclamation of our importance. To the contrary, the central theme of scripture is the glory of God. And as the people of God – here's the point – as the people of God, our desire is to know this God who is our Savior and our Redeemer. And that pursuit of the knowledge of God in itself is a noble and worthy endeavor for us to embark upon. We don't come first and foremost seeking what is the answer to my need for today, we come first and foremost asking, "Who is God and how can I know Him?" And as we do that, as we do that we see grandeur on display in the character of God and it has this humbling effect upon us that takes our eyes off of our own circumstances and lets us see themes that transcend our individual lives.

That's the privilege that we have to continue here this morning as we're going to answer this question, "What is the Trinity? What is the Trinity?" Most of you would affirm the Trinity to one degree or another, to the extent that you've given any thought about it, to the extent that you've been taught about it. It's harder to explain why you believe it because it is a transcendent doctrine. Just as we said last time, the thought that our God had no beginning, that there was no beginning to God is something that just shatters our mental capacity. There is no way to comprehend the grandeur of what that means. How majestic is that thought? That God is so eternal that he had no beginning? Well here as we come today, we're going to deal with similar thoughts as we consider the Trinity. And here's the foundational starting point for what we're going to consider today and as we deal with the whole doctrine of God last week and this week. Beloved, we have to anchor our thoughts right here. When we approach the eternal God—when I say 'approach,' what I mean by that is that when we study his character and attributes we should expect to find that there are things that go beyond our understanding. We should expect that to be the case. If God truly is eternal, if he is a spirit and immense and all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present, then we should expect to find that there are things that transcend our ability to understand.

At that point, when you start to bump up against those aspects of God that transcend our understanding, in the sense there's two ways that you can go. The way that most of the world goes that mocks what we believe is that they hold that in contempt, they reject it because they don't understand it and therefore mock it as if their mental capacity as a finite fallen being should be the measure of the exhaustion of truth. That's silly, isn't it? These people are going to be in a grave in a while and their mortal dust should become the measure by which we evaluate the capacity of who God is and can be? No, we're going to take it from a different perspective, we're going to realize that when we find things that we cannot completely understand, when things that we can't grasp, what we find and what our response is that we humble ourselves under the truth of scripture. We don't view it with contempt because something is bigger than us, we humble ourselves under it and realize that in the revelation of this God we have found the one whom we must worship, that we must honor.

Turn as an introductory text to Isaiah 55. Isaiah 55, to just kind of give us a place to start as we consider the doctrine of the Trinity. The greatness of God should bring us to repentance, the greatness of God should cause us to seek Him, the greatness of God should help us humble ourselves before Him. Look at Isaiah 55:6, we'll start there. A

word of invitation given to Israel as Isaiah preaches to them. A similar word of invitation given to those of you who are still outside of Christ, those of you who are in the darkness of sin. This call, this command, this invitation comes to those who do not know Him. "Seek the Lord," verse 6, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon Him while he is near." The time is brief, the time is passing, and here He is revealing Himself to us through His word. Call upon this God while there is still time, while he is near. Don't squander the opportunity that you have right here this morning to seek Him and to call upon Him.

What would you do as one outside of Christ? Verse 7, you would repent. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord." "Why would I do that?" you might say it's because of this promise of love and grace and compassion. The one who will turn from sin will find this to be true in verse 7, and this Lord, this Yahweh, He will have compassion on him. "Turn to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." My friend, if you're here today and you're outside of Christ you're still under judgment. Here's what you need to understand, here's what you need to realize and recognize. It's that you are in that condition of judgment, not from a lack of invitation and grace of God. God is gracious, he calls for and extends and promises his compassion and his mercy upon you and says, "Come, seek me. I'll have compassion on you." Those who hear those words from the scriptures and nevertheless turn away and find themselves in eternal judgment will have no one to blame but themselves. There's no excuse, there's nothing about the gospel invitation to turn away from, there's no reason to reject the Lord Jesus Christ except for your own selfish, sinful ways.

My friends, look at verse 7 again, look at the end of verse 7, "He will have compassion on him." Our God will have compassion on the one who turns to him. Why would you reject that compassion? Why would you reject mercy? There's no excuse. Scripture teaches that there is no excuse for turning away. And so we see that even as we enter into our consideration of the Trinity that we're approaching a God who is compassionate and merciful and calls and welcomes sinners who will come to him.

Now, that was all preliminary. Verse 8 here, as we're talking about the incomprehensibility of God and the fact that we should expect to find in God's nature things that go beyond our understanding, look at verse 8. God is speaking and he says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the Earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

And so as we come to this God, as we approach Him in His word, as we approach Him to study his character and attributes, our fundamental presupposition is that we're going to find things that go beyond our ability to grasp. That's the starting point, that's what we expect to occur, and when a ministry or a pastor or whatever gives you things that you can always understand and feel like you completely grasp and never gives you something that stretches you beyond the bounds of your own mental capacity, it's extremely unlikely that they're telling you truth. Because there has to come a point where we bow before this one who's greater than us, and as we consider the doctrine of the Trinity that's exactly what we find.

Charles Spurgeon said this in conjunction with the teaching of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. He said, and I quote, "We can never understand how Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be three and yet one. I have long ago given up any desire to understand this great mystery, for I am perfectly satisfied that if I could understand it it would not be true, because God, from the very nature of things, must be incomprehensible."

And so as we come we come with hearts that are humble, we come expecting things that transcend our understanding, and we come in reverence bowing before this majestic God.

What is the Trinity? Here's a definition, I'll go through this a time or two to give you time to write it down in your notes. What is the Trinity? Here's a definition: There is one true God with only one essence, who eternally exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I know some of you are trying to take it down, so I'll slow down just a touch here. There is one true God with only one essence, who eternally exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three persons are each fully and equally God. These three persons are each fully and equally God, and equally deserve worship and obedience, yet these three persons are only one God. I'll go through it one more time and then we'll expand and kind of define that in greater detail. There is one true God with only one essence, who eternally exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three persons are each fully and equally God, and equally deserve worship and obedience, yet these three persons are only one God.

It took the early church in the early centuries after the Apostolic Age a great deal of work and effort and fight against heresy in order to nail this down for all of time in terms of the declaration of the doctrine. We realize, understand, and freely acknowledge the fact that the word 'Trinity' appears nowhere in scripture, but we teach the doctrine of the Trinity because what the word represents is the fullness of the teaching of scripture about the character of God. We use the word 'Trinity' because that is the only word that gives justice to the full weight of the teaching of scripture about the nature of God. And this is a doctrine that has stood the test of time, the test of heretics that have tried to undermine it by denying the deity of Christ, and such other things. And so the question is not whether the word itself is found in scripture, but whether the doctrine that it represents is found in scripture, and that is what we're going to see here this morning.

We're going to break it into three principles and give supporting scripture here. So as you're taking notes, this would be your first point, and we'll go through some of these fairly quickly. First of all, first point, number one: There is one true God. There is one true God. And this is point the Bible repeatedly emphasizes. And if you want to jot down this first reference, Deuteronomy 6:4—Deuteronomy 6:4 says, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." The Lord is one. In 1 Corinthians, 8:4, the Bible says, "There is no God but one." Deuteronomy 6:4, 1 Corinthians 8:4. James 2:19 says, "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder." One God. There are no competitors to this God that we proclaimed last week, the immense eternal spirit who is the creator of Heaven and Earth. There is no other. He is alone in His Deity, He is alone in His Godhead, He is alone, the only true God. And that is the teaching of Christianity. Christianity teaches that there is only one God, contrary to the

misrepresentations that are made by Jews and others that we proclaim three gods. No, that is not the case, that is not what we teach, the Bible teaches that there is only one God and that is what we believe, period, end of sentence, end of paragraph. There's only one God.

Now, keep that in mind as we come to the second principle for this morning that we'll spend more time on. Point number two this morning: That one true God eternally exists in three persons. God eternally exists in three persons. Now, as you go through the Old Testament, we won't take the time to prove the point that I'm about to make, we'll save that for another time. But as you go through the Old Testament, which is so clearly monotheistic in its teaching, as you go through and consider the teaching of the Old Testament you will find that it anticipates a diversity within the one unity of God. There are plural references to God in the Old Testament, the very word that is used to describe God in Deuteronomy 6:4 is the Hebrew word 'echad'. It has the idea of one, but there's a diversity in the oneness, just like a—you hold up a bunch of grapes, you have one bunch of grapes, but there is diversity within that oneness. There's the stem and there are the different grapes that are there; there is a diversity there. And that same word that would describe a bunch of grapes is used to describe the one true God. One, but with a sense of diversity. You read through the scriptures and you see it talking about the angel of the Lord and then it describes that angel of the Lord as being God Himself, there are other things like that; plural references. And so even in the Old Testament where the teaching of the monotheistic nature of God is first put on display, there are glimpses, there are hints, there are indications that it's more than a simple absolute oneness, that there is a measure of diversity within that oneness, even as the Old Testament teaches.

Well here's the thing, beloved. Here's the thing, as you come to the New Testament, what is hinted at in the Old Testament is brought into clarity. Let's put it this way: The nature of God has always been the same. It has never ever changed, it is what it is, but the way that God made himself known was progressive in nature. He revealed portions in the Old Testament and then brought the New Testament—it was brought to greater light. Think about it this way, when I take my glasses off and I look out at you I see forms, but I don't see your faces very clearly; it's all blurry to me. But you're there, you are completely there right now without my glasses on exactly as you are, then I come along and I put on my glasses and oh, there is clarity that wasn't there before.

Well, here's what you must understand about the nature of the Bible and the way that God has made himself known over the centuries. In the Old Testament everything that we believe was there, nothing changed between the Old and the New Testament, but they were looking at this without the glasses on. When Jesus Christ came, when He revealed the nature of God more fully and when the apostles expanded on that, the glasses were put on so that what was always there was now seen with greater clarity. It's not that the Old contradicts the New any more than my view of you without my glasses contradicts what it is with the glasses on. We just go from hints and forms and peering as it were into a great veil of darkness in some ways, where there is some light but not enough, in the New Testament you come and the light is there for all to see and there is clarity added to what was hinted at in the Old Testament.

That's what we're about to see as we come to the second point. There is one true God, but point number two is that: This God eternally exists in three persons. Now there is a reason why we started with answering the question, "Why do we believe the Bible?" That's the cornerstone of everything. That's why we started there. And so we receive this as the word of God, we believe what the Bible says. Now follow me here as we read and study the scriptures faithfully over time and in conjunction with the men who have gone before us. We're not starting all over here, we're building on, we're standing on the shoulders of men who have studied scripture in the centuries before us. That's part of the treasure and the trust that is given to us here at Truth Community is that we're conscious of that. That we are the recipients of the work of great and godly men who have come before us, we want to be faithful vertically to God first of all, but we also want to be faithful to the inheritance and the stewardship that's been handed down to us from generation to generation; we're not trying to start new things and new thoughts here. Just as Paul said in 2 Timothy, chapter 2, "These things entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others," we've received it from faithful men, we want to be faithful and pass it on so that others will be faithful, too. We see ourselves in an historical continuity. We're not trying to make things up and be new and fresh and unique, we just want to be faithful to what scripture says and what's been taught before us.

Well as we do that, the Bible itself compels us to accept the doctrine of the Trinity, there's no way around it. You can't deny the Trinity without denying the Bible, because the Bible teaches that there is one God, and as it teaches that, side-by-side, without apology, it teaches that there are three persons who are God, that this one God exists in three persons, alright? That's what we're going to look at right now.

And so first of all, and this is a sub-point. God eternally exists in three persons sub-point A: The Father is God. Turn in your Bibles to John 6:27. John 6:27. We won't spend much time here, this is not a contested point really, but in John 6:27 Jesus said, "Do not work," and by the way, I'm just giving you representative texts here this morning. We're not trying to be exhausted, this is a survey message, we're just trying to point things out without being exhaustive in any way here. We're just trying to lay the foundation so that we have something to stand on and build from in future days to come. John 6:27, Jesus said, "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you." Watch this, "For on Him," that is on Christ, "the Father," here comes the appositive, "God has set his seal." Jesus says the Father is God and God has set his seal on the Son of Man. The Father is God. Now we don't need to spend much time on that point, because hardly anyone would dispute it. Maybe a group like the United Pentecostals would try to fuss about that and dispute that point, but in the general discussion of Christianity this is assumed, and it is what scripture teaches. The Father is God.

Now keeping those things in mind, everything that we've said so far, we come to sub-point B here and that is this: The Son is God. The Son is God. Now I realize that if you go too fast on this someone's head's going to pop open, so I want to slow down and not go too fast here. There's a single—that the deity that belongs to God is a single undivided essence. If you wanted to put it this way, in crass terms, the stuff that makes up God belongs fully to the Father, and the stuff, the essence that makes up God also belongs

fully to Jesus Christ, the Son. The complete essence that belongs to God the Father also belongs to Jesus Christ the Son. Stated differently, the deity that belongs exclusively to God the Father, also belongs to Jesus Christ. I'll state it differently. Every attribute that God the Father has Jesus Christ has also. There is no distinguishing, there is no separation, there is no diminishment of deity as you go from the Father to the Son, the full deity of the Father is also found in all of its inexpressible majesty, also in Jesus Christ.

You're in the gospel of John, turn back to John chapter 1, the very first verse of John chapter 1. This verse is a message in itself, also. John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Let's go from the back to the front of this verse. "The Word was God," it's a statement of quality. Whoever this Word is, whoever the Word is is said to be God Himself. It's not that the Word was a god. If you've been influenced by Jehovah's Witnesses and are confused on that point, let me know, I can clear that up for you in another setting. That is a demonstrably, deliberate falsehood propagated by Jehovah's Witnesses that is obviously refuted and there is no dispute about it. It is a deliberate deception for them to try to say that this Word was a god and therefore is not the true God. Take that on faith, but if that's something that's troubled you let me know, I have lots to help you on that.

"The Word was God," is what it says. By very quality, by very essence He was God. Look at it, though. This starts to go beyond our capacity of comprehension. "The Word was with God." Somehow God was with God, somehow there's this one essence, but there is somehow a distinction in persons sharing that one indivisible essence so that the Word could right be described as God and also somehow being described as being with God. We wouldn't talk about ourselves that way, at least not without realizing that they'd probably put a white coat on us and carry us off. "I'm Don and I'm with Don." "What? Why would you want to be with him?" In the nature of God this can be properly said without apology, the Word was God and yet He was with God. Who was this 'Word'? Look at verse 14, it's what the whole gospel of John is about, this Word became flesh, a clear reference to Jesus Christ. So Christ was with God, He was God, and He became flesh.

Turn over in your Bibles to Colossians, the book of Colossians, chapter 2, just after Ephesians and Philippians. Colossians 2:8 says, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception." Let me stop there. Part of the reason that we do this is that we recognize that there are all kinds of satanically, demonically inspired representatives who are propagating philosophies and deceptions that would draw people away from the truth. We are not willing, as a body of believers, to stand by while that happens. We're not willing to let that go as if truth didn't matter. It does matter. And so that is why we view that as one of the central purposes of why this place exists is to be proclaimers and upholders of the truth which saved our own souls. Well Paul says, "See to it," apparently it's a threat, apparently there's danger here and he says, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception." It's going to sound good but it's actually going to be wrong, "according to the tradition of man, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ."

What about this Christ, Paul? Verse 9, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." That's our point for this morning. In Christ, perfectly consistent with what is said at the beginning of the gospel of John, this is saying the same thing in a slightly different way, that the full essence of God is found in the person of Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ walked on the Earth men saw God in human flesh.

Turn back to the gospel of John chapter 14, I hadn't planned to go here, but you need to see this. You need to see this. This helps us understand what Jesus was saying in John 14:8-9. In verse 8, Philip, one of the disciples hadn't gotten the clarity that he wanted yet—actually go up to verse 7, Jesus said, "If you had known Me you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him and have seen Him." That is an absolutely statement of deity that can only be true if Jesus Christ Himself is perfectly God, because if there is any difference, if there is any distinction, if there is any diminishment of deity in Christ, then you could never say that you have seen the essence of God the Father when you look at Him. Jesus says, "If you've known me you know my Father. From now on," speaking to those are there in front of Him, who saw Him in the flesh, "From now on you know Him and have seen Him." What a staggering statement. Jesus is saying to people who were raised on the idea that there is one true God, He says, "When you see Me you've seen Him."

Philip is grasping after that in verse 8 and he said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father and it's enough for us." And Jesus, as it were, kind of scratches his head, not because he didn't understand, but it shows that Philip didn't understand. That very question betrayed a fundamental ignorance about the character of God and the character of Christ. In verse 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say show us the Father? How can you say that in light of who I am? Don't you see that when you see Me you are seeing undiminished deity veiled in human flesh? What you see in my character, Philip, is exactly what God is like and that's because I'm God."

The Son is God. Now there is no way to start to piece that together apart from the doctrine of the Trinity. One essence, three persons. One essence, three persons: Father and Son. The Bible calls Jesus God, He does the works of God, He has the name of God, He has unity with God the Father. That can only be true if He's God, if He has the very essence of who God is. Scripture says, "All of that essence is found in Christ."

And so, beloved, that's why we treat the name of Christ and the person of Christ with such holy reverence. It's unthinkable to us to use His name as a curse word like some of us, including your speaker did before conversion, and trample on His name as if it were a common cuss word. Oh, the fact that that came out of my mouth makes me want to cut my tongue out and cast it away. We're talking about the very essence of God when we name the name of Christ. And so you see, this isn't an abstract theoretical discussion, this is what humbles our heart and drives us to worship. That this one who walked on the sod of Earth was the God of heaven and earth.

And so as we consider the doctrine of the Trinity, we are giving definition and substance to the object of our worship. We are seeing Him, and receiving Him, and honoring Him

for who He is. The Father is God and the Son is God, thirdly for the third person, the Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit is God. There are those groups, I'll leave them unnamed for now, that will talk about the Holy Spirit as an abstract force, as a neuter kind of being. That's not the scriptural teaching of the Holy Spirit at all. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is God, He is a person with intelligence, will, and emotion. When we say that the Holy Spirit indwells us, we're not saying that there is some kind of spiritual power in us, as if electricity had somehow been encapsulated and put into the members of our flesh. No, we're saying that there is a person that indwells us. A person who is intelligent, who has his own volition, who has even emotions, scripture describes. And this Holy Spirit is clearly identified as God.

Look at the Book of Acts chapter 5. A familiar passage, but it's familiar for a reason. It's familiar because what it teaches is so central and crucial. It was at an early worship service in the early church, and in chapter 5:1, "A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet." They make a public display of the gift that they're about to say and were handing it all over, "We're giving it to you." But Peter wasn't having any of it. He said, and watch what he says here, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?" Now you can tell a lie, but if you're telling a lie to the force of electricity it's not a personal offense. You could go to up to the outlet and say, "I'm the most handsome man that ever walked on the face of the earth," it would be a lie, but the outlet isn't going to be offended by that because it's an impersonal object. Not so with the Holy Spirit. He was lying to a person. And who was that person? Verse 4, "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." Look at verse 3 again, "Ananias, why did you lie to the Holy Spirit?" Verse 4, "You've not lied to men but to God." Lying to the Holy Spirit is equated with lying to God, that can only be true if the Holy Spirit is God Himself. And so scripture teaches us, clearly, even in this brief survey that we've made here, that there's one true God, only one, and yet this God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now most of you will be familiar with ways that people have tried to illustrate the Trinity to make it fit within our minds. Some people will say that the Trinity is just like water, that the same water can be ice, liquid, and steam, as if that illustrates it and gives us the idea of the incomprehensibility of God. And you say, "Oh, well water, yeah. Then if God's just like water—" but that's not true, that's not a good example at all. God eternally exists, simultaneously exists always and forever as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three simultaneously. The same measure of water does not do that. Water isn't the same, water is not simultaneously ice, liquid, and steam. Water doesn't exist—the same water does not exist in all three forms at the same time. Water only illustrates the false doctrine of modalism, which says one God appears in three different forms but at different times. Water's not a good example.

And beloved, let's go back to our starting point. This is really important. This goes to the way that we think about God—I don't like the terminology that I'm about to use, but this

goes to us—letting God be God, letting God be greater than who we are. Would you really be driven to worship a God who could be fully and accurately compared to a glass of tap water? Is that an object of worship? Is that a right way to think about God? As something that could be poured into a glass? No. No. No, remember where our starting point was, at the very beginning of this message. That there's an element of incomprehensibility about who the true God is. If we could comprehend it by simply looking at a daily element of H₂O and say, "That exhausts it. That covers it. That's it in the exact equivalent." We just turned God into tap water. We can't do that. That's not right. We don't bring down God to a physical element that He Himself created. The illustration is well-intended, but it's completely wrong. It teaches us and conditions us to look for—in the one, true, living, eternal, immense God, things that we can easily understand. That's an entirely wrong way to think. The very presupposition is wrong. No, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are simultaneously 100% God in one indivisible essence.

That brings us to our third point for this morning. We said that there is one true God, we said that God eternally exists in three persons, and now thirdly: These three persons are one God. Point number three: These three persons are one God. And as we look at this, ever so briefly now, here's what I want you to think about. The majority, if not the vast majority of you are here today because you're a born-again Christian, you rejoice in the reality of your salvation, you are conscious of the forgiveness of sin, you're conscious of new life within you, you rejoice in the scriptures, and you rejoice in your salvation. What we are about to see here gives you insight into the nature of what that is like. We get to see, as it were, the veil pulled back, and we get to see this one eternal God eternally existing in three persons, acting on your behalf for your salvation. The most precious thing we have, our eternal soul as it were, that which is the abiding aspect of our existence, it is this Triune God that redeemed it, and this is what we get to see here.

Point number three: These three persons are one God. Here's what I mean by that. That these three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are repeatedly placed on equal standing in the scripture. Turn over to the gospel of Matthew chapter 3. They are repeatedly placed on equal standing in the scripture, we see them doing the work of God in individual ways simultaneously. In Matthew chapter 3 we're going to see this first of all at Jesus' baptism. At Jesus' baptism. Verse 16, do you remember the story? He came to John the Baptist to be baptized, John protested because Christ had no sin from which he needed to repent. Jesus said, "Permit it. We need to fulfill all righteousness," and John baptized him. Now watch in verse 16, "And after being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." From heaven, the Father speaks. Jesus is in the water. The Spirit of God has descended upon him. They are distinguished in this historical moment, but they are existing simultaneously with one another. Part of what we see here is that these persons within the Trinity have different functions, they have relationship with one another, the Father is speaking, the Spirit is descending, the Son has been baptized, all of them independently, as it were, in one sense, having their own function, but acting in perfect harmony to give testimony to the

fact that the one who is in the water was the very Son of God; the three of them on equal standing, acting together.

Turn to the end of the gospel, we see it not only in Jesus' baptism, but in the Great Commission. Mathew 28:19. And it's fascinating to see, even in the English text how the unity and the diversity of the Triune God is preserved in a single verse. You can see this clearly. The only reason it doesn't jump out to us more is that we tend to read carelessly and too quickly. Jesus is giving commission to his disciples, he's about to ascend into Heaven, he says, "Here's what I want you to do when I leave." Verse 19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Wait, wait, wait, what's expressed here is a grammatical impossibility. It doesn't make sense in one superficial, casual reading of it. Look at what it says. This is very clear in the original language as well. Jesus says baptize them in the name, one single name, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Why not three names? If there's three persons there, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? We can count. Yet it says one name. Do you see? Jesus carefully said, "In the name," one God, and then notice that the grammar preserves the distinction between the persons because each one has its own separate article. *The* name, one name, of *the* Father and *the* Son, the repeated article indicating a distinction, and *the* Holy Spirit. If it was three gods it would be the names, but it's not. If it was one God without any distinction whatsoever, there wouldn't be three individual articles there applied. And so in the very nature of the Great Commission, watch this, at the very fountain of what the church is to do is a clear affirmation of the Triune God. The heart of what we do finds its origin in the nature of the Triune God. We go and we make disciples and we baptize them in the Triune name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

You listen when we have our next baptism, when people are baptized, we're going to be very careful to follow that precise formula, because it's significant, it's *the* name of *the* Father and *the* Son and *the* Holy Spirit. There's a Triune reason why we do that. Now watch, I know what's going to happen, the next baptism service we have I'll stumble over this, but if I stumble it'll be because of my weakness, not because of any diminishment of the truth of what we said here. One name, three persons. One essence, three persons.

Now some people, other people over the course of time have tried to use an egg as an analogy of the Trinity. They'll say, "God is three-in-one like an egg. There's the egg shell, there's the yolk, and there's the white of the egg. Those three-in-one egg—" You know what? I know you don't believe that to be an accurate representation of the Trinity. You know how I know that that's true? Because I know that if you're ever eating eggs and you find a piece of an egg shell in it you will pick it out and remove it, because the essence of the egg shell is not the same as the other two edible parts of it. The essence of the egg shell is not the essence of the yolk, it is not the essence of the white, the essences are different. That is not what we're teaching about the Trinity; an egg is not like God. Honestly, do we even have to say that? Do we even—what are we thinking? And I want you to see what all of those well-intentioned things that superficially sound plausible, but actually illustrate heresy, I want you to see what we're doing. We're trying to bring God down to something that we can hold and have control over, that we can define in our mind without remainder.

Look, that's never going to happen. You're never going to truly teach the nature of God and find that there aren't things that go beyond what you're able to understand. You're not going to be able to teach God without remainder. It's going to spill over and go beyond the limits of your finite mind. And only when we begin to appreciate that, only when we begin to embrace that and defend it and proclaim it are we really going to have a sense of the consciousness of the fact that we are serving and worshipping one who utterly transcends us, and then go about our service with a proper sense of humility anchored deep in our souls. The great theologian Louis Berkhof put it this way and I quote, "All analogies fail us. The Trinity is a mystery far beyond our comprehension. It is the incomprehensible of the Godhead."

Now I'm almost done here. Listen to me carefully. When we say that there is one God who exists in three persons we are not engaging in a contradiction. This is not a contradiction. God is not one in the same way that He is three; He has one essence existing in three persons, fully shared by three persons. And so we're not saying that there's one God and there are three Gods, we're saying there is one God who exists in three persons. That's obviously different, even though we can't get our minds fully around all that that means.

Final thing where we see this displayed in scripture, turn to 2 Corinthians as we close, 2 Corinthians chapter 13. And as we see this we see the fountain that flows out of the blessings in our life from the Godhead. 2 Corinthians 13:14, the very last verse in that epistle, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." The blessings from God of grace, love, and fellowship are coming from three persons on an equal basis at the same time. One God, three persons dispensing his goodness to believers. See beloved, this goes to the very core of who we are as Christians. This shapes our worship. The Holy Spirit, who is God, has united us with the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God, who redeemed us with his own blood, and now because the Spirit has joined us with Christ, who died for us, now we are joined to God the Father and have communion with him.

This incomprehensibly great doctrine of the Trinity defines who we are, it helps us understand and grab something of the magnificence of our salvation. It drives us to gratitude and to worship. And when we're there, when we're in that spirit of worship, on our knees contemplating, thinking about meditating on this one who is so much greater than us, then we're driven a little closer to the proper kind of worship that we should be offering to God in response. Jesus said, "God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Part of our worship is acknowledging him to be this great Triune God of which scripture so clearly testifies.

Bow with me in prayer.

O Great Triune God, we do worship you. We bow before you, we acknowledge our limitations, we see this in the word, we acknowledge that we can't explain it by human analogy, but we receive it, Father. We believe it, not because it's subjected to our understanding, but because it is revealed in the word which we have received from the

Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And so Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we honor you as the one true God. We thank you for making yourself known to us, we thank you for the grace and love and fellowship that you dispense to us, and we pray for those who do not yet know you, Father. That you would quicken their heart, that having been in the presence of this Triune God would humble their hearts and cause them to turn to Christ in the power of the Spirit for true salvation. Father, receive our worship, inadequate and tainted though it may be Father, it comes from those who want to love you with all of our hearts. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.