

Introduction to the Trinity

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 May 2021

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0 : 00] It says, Hik suit draconase. Out in the ocean there, Hik suit draconase. What do you think that means? Any guesses? Very good.

Here be dragons. Here be dragons. It's dangerous. Unexplored territory. You bring your ship, you take your ship down to these waters.

Who knows what you're going to find? Who knows what you're going to see? And who knows if you're going to be able to come back from this? Here be dragons. So, sadly, that's how studying the Trinity can feel.

Like, we're taking our ship out into these treacherous, frightening waters, and who knows what we're going to find, this unexplored territory. So, if you were to do a historical or academic study on the Trinity, you'd start running into words that Tracy Kirtay is very afraid of.

She just talked about it. Bring this down to my level. You'd run into words like homoousius, which is orthodox, which is correct, versus homoousius, which is heretical.

[1 : 17] The difference was one letter between orthodoxy and heresy. One Jesus, one Jesus who is homoousius with the Father, can save you.

Jesus that is only homoousius, like the Father, cannot save you. So, words like hypostasis, or consubstantiality, or perichoresis, or circumincesso, which is just the Latin version of perichoresis, and you start running into words like that, ideas like that.

And that's probably where you're saying, whoa, I don't know about this. Well, let me say, first of all, all those words are glorious and good words.

They are necessary words. They are wonderful words. One of my favorite classes, or probably my favorite class in seminary, was ancient church history, and it was my favorite because the church in that period was wrestling with and dealing with some of these very basic theological ideas of, what does it mean that God is a trinity?

And Jesus, what does it mean that he was God and man? Was he both God and man? Completely God and man? Was he full humanity? Was he full divinity?

[2 : 47] Thinking about, so the church was trying to defend against heretics who were saying things that didn't fit with the scriptures, that didn't fit with what the church had been teaching for generations.

And that class was wonderful because when you are faced with really trying to think hard and understand both positions, when you're thinking about perichoresis, which is the glorious truth that each of the persons in the trinity indwell each other.

Wherever one is, they both are. They indwell and they envelop each other. They're separate persons, but they're always living together in love.

Now, when you think about that and you keep thinking about it, your heart does turn to worship. It really does. But is that what the series is going to be?

Going into these deep theological controversies, into this deep theology that doesn't, like Scott said, what's the practical point that doesn't have any direct, absolutely direct practical point?

[3 : 58] We're going to find out that it has a lot of intimate practicality. But, you know, maybe you say, I've lived as a Christian for 40 years without, I've never even heard of the word perichoresis.

I think I'm doing okay. I think I'm good. Well, is that what this is about? Is this about, you know, stodgy? I say all these things sort of in the worst tongue-in-cheek kind of way, stodgy and stuffy doctrine.

Not at all. That's not what this book is about. That's not what this book is like. And hopefully, if the teachers and I, if we all do a good job together, that's not what this class is going to be.

Today is an introduction. And I'm going to introduce the book. And really, my primary goal is to clear the runway. We want to take this jet off the runway.

But there's obstacles, there's things on the runway that we have to clear away. And that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to do a lot of clearing away. And then next week, Lord willing, Roger is going to take this airplane off.

[5 : 06] And we're going to start to study what was God doing before creation. We're going to think about that for two weeks. But today is just clearing the runway, getting some things out of the way.

So, we're not looking at stodgy, stuffy, highfalutin doctrine that doesn't have any practical purpose in my life, that is just needlessly philosophical or something like that, or even necessarily philosophical.

We're going to be talking about God and who he is. God is love. God is love. When you hear those words and you think about those words, they lift your spirits, don't they?

They encourage you. There's something inviting and winsome about that that's lively and lovely.

You're sort of sitting next to this crackling fire and your heart is being warmed when you think, my God is love.

He's love in a way that he's not other attributes. He's love. But when we say God is Trinity, that hardly has the same effect, does it?

[6 : 32] All of a sudden, we're starting to feel like we're getting into these troubled, unexplored waters. Here will be dragons. But what we want to do in this series is to just explode that idea, to put just 20 tons of biblical TNT into our hearts and explode that idea.

idea. Because here's the truth. God is love because God is Trinity. God is love because God is Trinity.

The fact that God is a Trinity should thrill our hearts, should excite us, should lift our spirits, should make us shout for joy.

And this series is a chance to see and taste that the Lord is good. He's good.

And we're going to find out just how good he is and what that goodness looks like. He is love. He's infinite, eternal, unchanging, outgoing, ever overflowing, never holding anything back, love.

[7 : 47] That's because he's a Trinity. Because he's three in one. Now, the goal is, is to really, to be winsome, to win your heart, to encourage you, to draw out your heart towards the Lord, to taste and see that he is good.

But the series is meant to refresh you and encourage you with a look at who your God is and what kind of God he is. We are going to be drinking from his river of delights because he himself is that river of delights.

And to know him is, there's pleasures forevermore at his right hand because he's the fountain of pleasure. He's the fountain of joy. And so what we're going to do is come near to him in this series. Now, because it's really only when we grasp the Trinity that we begin to see God's beauty and God's goodness and God's love and his kindness, his loveliness.

So if we were somehow able to shave the Trinity off of God, we wouldn't be relieving him of dead weight, of problems.

[9 : 00] We wouldn't be relieving him of this weird oddity that makes him so hard to talk about to others. We would be shaving off precisely what makes God so good and so desirable.

That's what we're going to find out. Scott says, is it practical? And the answer is yes. Knowing God better has profound practical effects on your life.

We know that. Knowing the love of God makes us more loving. We love because he first loved us. That first and foremost, that greatest duty, that greatest grace of love is a reflection that God puts upon our own hearts.

That we, he loves us. And so we love one another. We're called to be imitators of God. Therefore, as dearly loved children.

So the Trinity is the pattern, but the Trinity is also the power to do that. As we experience and take in and enjoy and understand the Trinity, that does set us free from loving ourselves.

[10 : 16] It bends us. It takes us from being more bent in to just exploding that out. So God doesn't just command us to love. He does.

And he should. He does command us to love, but he does more than that. He, he woos us. He changes us.

He invites us. He encourages us. He inspires us. He changes us by getting on the inside of us by the Holy Spirit, the spirit of love, and just blowing us outward.

That's what it means to have the life of God and the soul of man, is that God comes in with his love and bends us outward towards others and outgoing, outflowing, diffusing love.

That's what it, that's what he's doing. Thomas Chalmers, he was a Scottish preacher in the 1800s. He was, he was regarded as the finest preacher of his day.

[11 : 20] He preached a sermon called the expulsive, the expulsive, the ability to explode something out, to expel something, the expulsive power of a new affection.

And it's when God's love and his loveliness gets inside of us, where we're now tasting and seeing and experiencing God's love, God's goodness, that it does blow us outward.

It changes us. And so we start to desire him and we want him and we begin to enjoy him. And that changes the things that I want. This is, remember we're talking about, is this practical?

Well, this is practical. Naturally, I want sin. I find sin desirable. I find sin useful. I find sin helpful. I find sin enjoyable.

I find sin pleasing. But when the love of God gets into us, when God himself gets into us, those things lose their power. How can we say no to sin except by repenting and turning to God and saying and experiencing him?

[12 : 33] So this disarms the idols of my heart that control me, that dominate my preferences and my desires and my inclinations, the things that drive my behavior.

So I begin to want God more than anything else. I want to enjoy him. I want to have fellowship with him. I want to be close to him. And when I want to be close to him, that means I'm going to start pulling sins out of my life because that sin is actually keeping me from full enjoyment of God.

And so the love of God and the desire for God makes me mortify my sin. It makes me do hard things and say no to myself. The grace of God teaches us to say no to ungodliness.

His love is better than life. And so I cut off right hands and I gouge out right eyes because his love and experiencing and enjoying his love is better than life.

So it's better than right eyes and right hands. So knowing God changes us. It changes everything. It literally changes everything.

[13 : 39] Listen to Michael Reeves. It affects everything. It changes everything. From how we listen to music to how we pray.

It makes for happier marriages. Warmer dealings with others. Better church life. It gives Christians assurance.

It shapes holiness and transforms the way we look at the world around us. No exaggeration. The knowledge of this God turns lives around.

That's what we're going to see tonight at the baptism. Knowing the mercy and the love of God changes people's lives.

Now, again, I said, so it does have this practical purpose. It's going to have a profound, diffuse, transformative power upon your life to know God, to have dealings with him, to see him as love, and to begin to experience that more and more has a profound influence an amazing transformation can begin to happen again and again in my heart.

[14 : 49] Now, again, I said, my job is to clear the runway, and so we need to, that's what we're going to do from here on out. We're going to take some of these obstacles and remove them and out of the way, and we have to get them out of the way, or we're not going to be able to really move into this study.

So, a couple of obstacles. The first is, seeing the Trinity is just an oddity. An oddity. Like a trite, silly, weird thing.

Now, it's kind of understandable how some people get to this point of thinking primarily, you know, they can have a very big view of God. He's high, he's holy, he's majestic, he's glorious, and then what, and then like, sort of the Trinity gets snuck in there as like an afterthought, and it's kind of weird.

They don't know what to do with it. And it's understandable how people get there, because the way some people try to explain the Trinity or illustrate it, it does make it kind of weird.

weird. So, you know, have you ever had a really bizarre dream that you could barely understand, and then you're like, okay, I'm going to tell this dream to my spouse, or I'm going to tell this dream to my friend, and you're like, okay, here goes nothing, and you say it, and it's like, okay, that was

weird.

[16:20] Is that what talking about the Trinity is like? Well, someone says, you know, the Trinity is a bit like an egg. There's a shell and a yolk and the white, but it's all one egg.

Let me say, there's a reason that those kinds of illustrations aren't in the Bible. One, it's silly. Two, it's wrong.

Okay, and someone says, well, okay, the Trinity is like a clover leaf. It's one leaf, but it has three bits or bumps sticking out, you know, just like the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And again, no wonder people are like, that's weird. That's kind of trite. Other explanations. The Trinity is like a man who can be a father and a son and an uncle all at the same time, same person, different relationships.

Again, that's wrong. And it's silly because when you bring that sort of explanation to people, they're not coming away with this big view of God.

[17:29] They're left with saying, yeah, but that's not what the Trinity is talking about. What do you, that doesn't help. The Trinity is like water, like H₂O.

Water can be a solid, it can be a liquid, or it can be a gas. Again, wrong. Or, it's, he is like a three-headed giant.

Or, and this is what Michael Reeves said, I couldn't find an actual illustration of where people talked about the Trinity like this, but it can be like streaky bacon. I don't, again, when you start talking about the Trinity and those kinds of terms, and that's all the further you get, it does seem kind of weird.

And, when you're talking and thinking like that, it's no wonder that you're really not enjoying the Trinity. Now, the thing is, is we don't need to talk like that.

We don't need these weird little illustrations that just fall apart instantly once you pick them up. The Bible gives us a way to talk about and to understand the Trinity that is both understandable to a certain degree, that is helpful, that is serious, that is encouraging, that helps us in our Christian life.

[18:54] The Bible tells us and teaches us how to talk and how to think about the Trinity. We don't need to smuggle in these bizarre little illustrations that actually reduce God and confuse the situation that don't really help us.

So, the Trinity is not an oddity like that. Here's another obstacle. And this is definitely an obstacle that more serious people can fall into. Theologians call it the *via negativa* or the negative way, the way of negation, where you are concerned about not saying the wrong thing, and so you say, what something isn't?

You say, God is not like this. God is not a man. And the problem with only doing that is you, all you end up saying is what something is not.

So it's not that, not that, not that, not that, not that, but you haven't gotten around to saying what it is. And now there's a legitimate place for saying that for things that God isn't.

God isn't a man that he should lie. Okay? God isn't a man. God is not a creature. He is the creator.

[20:15] He is, you know, he does not have a body like men. There are lots and lots of legitimate places for saying what God isn't. But the problem is when all you have when you're thinking about the Trinity is what God isn't, what the Trinity isn't.

So the Father is not the Son. The Spirit is not the Father or the Son. There are not three gods. The Father does not become the Son.

The Son does not become the Spirit. Now all of those things are true and we need those kind of statements. We need those kind of statements. We need to have those barriers.

The problem is if that's all the further you get, then the Trinity doesn't mean this and doesn't mean that and doesn't mean this and you're just so careful of you're not going to fall into any sort of heretical beliefs.

Well, what you're left with, what do you have in your hands after all of that? You just have a vacuum. You have a nothing. And we can't relate and we can't love with something that's not this, not this, not this, not this, not this.

[21:22] We need to have something to hold on to, something in the middle. What does the Trinity mean? What does that mean? You know, because at the end of the day, we could avoid all the nasty heresies, but if we're not moved to worship, then what good is it done?

If we haven't found any comfort, then what does our very careful saying, it's not this, it's not that, it's not this, are we assured? Are we moved to love?

Are we moved to worship? Do we find help? Is there grace there? Well, is that where the Bible leaves us? Safely, without any heresy, but completely empty of joy in the Lord, in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

No, the Bible doesn't leave us there. The Bible gives us lots and lots of things that we can hold on to, that we can understand, that are meant to make an impression on our hearts.

Now, the Bible is much more proactive, much more engaging. It really is, through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit comes and engages men to know God, to enjoy God, to repent, to believe, to trust Him.

[22 : 42] The Bible is moving out and informing the hearts and the minds of people. Paul prayed in Ephesus, or in the book of Ephesians, excuse me, he says this, I pray that you might have the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him, that is God, the Father, better.

I pray that you might have the Holy Spirit, more of Him, so that you can know God better. I'm actually going to preach on this tonight, so I don't want to get too much into it.

But, again, the Bible is not all about, hey, avoid every single heresy, and then you're left with nothing. The Bible is, okay, we want to know the Lord.

Here's another obstacle we have to avoid. We have to avoid, and this is what Roger Michaud was saying, or at least addressing what he was saying, we need to avoid putting the Trinity into just the pure mystery category.

mystery. Now, is the Trinity a mystery that you'll never be able to completely understand? Yes, definitely. There are the secret things that belong to God.

[24 : 08] We, you know, an ant is closer to understanding us than we are to understanding and comprehending God. We are on the same sort of plane as an ant.

finite. We are both creatures. Finite. Came into being. You know, God has always been. And he's always been the way he is.

We are not, there is going to be mystery. But we need to be very careful how we use this word and what we use that word for.

Paul uses the word mystery sometimes. Ephesians chapter 3, he talks about the mystery of Christ. Surely you've heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you.

That is, the mystery made known to me by the revelation. And he goes on. Paul's job is to make plain to everyone this administration of grace, this mystery.

[25 : 11] And the mystery in this context is clearly that now the Jews and the Gentiles have been brought together and won people. That was something that was unexpected.

It was a secret, so to speak. So, mystery for Paul doesn't mean some mysterious thing that no one can understand. That's not how he's using it.

Something, you know, you whisper piously to other people, well, this is a mystery we aren't meant to know. God is a mystery. He is.

But the Trinity isn't a mystery in the sense that, like, you know, things that go bump in the night and you're kind of, you know, who can know, so why bother? God is a mystery. That's not that kind of mystery where we, you know, sort of piously say to each other, well, we shouldn't dig too deep.

We shouldn't try to understand this. You know, and then what we do is we just put it into that category of mystery and don't go any further with it. We've safely sequestered it away from ourselves, so now we're not dealing with it.

[26 : 25] we're not trying to understand the Lord. God wants to be known. He wants us to understand him and what he's like, and we're never going to understand him comprehensively, but that doesn't mean that we can't know him truly, and that doesn't mean that we can't know him better, and that doesn't mean we can't dig in deeper.

The Trinity is a God that we can know. That's what the Bible is for, that we might know God. And he's going to be a God that we're going to forever get to know better and better.

We're going to love him better and adore him more as we know him as the countless ages go by.

So all of this to say the Trinity is not an oddity, it's not a mystery that we're just supposed to just put away on the shelf and not ever think about because who can understand it completely?

Well, again, we say, yeah, it is a mystery, but we don't disengage from it. It's not a problem to tiptoe around. Pressing into the Trinity is doing what David said in Psalm 27.

I'll just read this, 27.4. one thing I ask of the Lord. This is what I seek. So, David, what is the one thing that you are passionately driving for?

[27 : 59] This is the one thing that you want. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.

what this class is intended to do is to be, to help us to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. Here's another obstacle that we need to get out of the way. The word Trinity is not in the Bible. Bible. And that's what people say.

The Trinity is not in the Bible. And we have to say, yep, you're right, it's not there. Some people are saying the Trinity was just this thing that the later church came up with. You know, some musty old theologians came around and they, you know, there they were in their monasteries thinking up things and getting all complicated and then they just decided to make things more complicated than what they were.

And so they came up with this idea of this is the Trinity, but it's not in the Bible. It's not in the Bible. The problem with that is it just does not hold up.

[29 : 16] It doesn't hold up to history. It doesn't hold up to actually what happened. Paul, the Apostle Paul, the Apostle John, the Apostle Peter, all the Gospels are quite comfortable and this is maybe even some of the problem is they are so comfortable talking about in Trinitarian terms.

They don't even feel much of a need to explain some of the questions that we have later. But they are so comfortable talking in Trinitarian terms.

You don't see the early church having this one particular like God as this one person. You don't see the church fumbling around in ignorance and then 500 years later all these really smart theologians got together and they figured it out.

They figured out the Trinity and they cleared it up with all these complicated theological terms. No, that's not how it worked at all. The early church did do the hard work of digging into the scriptures. scriptures. And I have only read a little bit of the early church on some of these things. Only a very tiny bit. I don't pretend to be an expert.

[30 : 32] But what you see when you read them is they are thinking hard. They are thinking carefully. They are understanding and looking into implications that because you have to understand the situation was they are locking horns with people who are teaching heresy.

And this is basic foundational stuff. And they didn't have the why. It wasn't like there was all this language yet to explain it.

But there they are. They're digging into it and they're thinking carefully. But all of the time what you see is them staring at the text and saying, okay, this is what this teaches.

They're looking at the Bible and they're saying, this is what this says. This is what this means. This is what this implies. They're not like coming up with this idea and then sort of implanting it or impressing it upon the Bible.

It's just not the way it's done. They dig it out of the scriptures. scriptures. And they're digging deep because people were getting it wrong.

[31 : 56] So they wanted to clear it up. But again and again they went back to the Bible and they stuck close to it. And that's what we're going to do in this study. The whole book you're not going to find, we're not going to get off into some weird philosophical things where we're talking about Aristotle and things like that.

That's not what we see. We're going to be looking at the text. We're going to be looking at the scriptures. We're going to be thinking about what the Bible says. And yes, we're going to be drawing things out of it. But we're looking at the Bible.

Last objection. How important is the Trinity? How important is it to get this right? Maybe you think, well, it's not as important as some other things, right?

It's not as important as some other things. Well, I want you to get a good grip on your seat, square up your feet, square up your shoulders, get ready to hear one of the creeds of the early church.

This is the Athanasian creed, named after Athanasius who vigorously defended the Trinity in his time. He didn't actually write this creed, but it was just named after him. But this is one of the creeds of the church written in the face of opposition and heresy that is accepted among all Orthodox Christianity.

[33 : 22] Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, this is before any of those developments came. This is one of, this is absolute foundation stuff accepted by all Christian groups, regardless of anything else.

How important is it to believe and to know the Trinity? Listen to what they wrote. Whosoever will be saved.

Whosoever will be saved. Before all things, it is necessary that he holds the Catholic faith, that is the Orthodox faith, which faith except one do keep whole and undefiled, which means unless you keep this faith whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the Catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity. Now isn't that a bit extreme.

We have to believe the whole and undefiled Trinity, or perish everlastingly. Doesn't that go too far? Before all things?

[34 : 50] And maybe we would say, well, aren't there some other things that maybe are before all things? 1 Corinthians 15, 3 talks about, you know, things that are absolutely vital, of first importance, salvation by grace alone, Christ's atoning work on the cross, the resurrection, those are all things of first importance according to 1 Corinthians 15, 3, and those things are absolutely vital and necessary.

There is no gospel without them. There's no gospel without the atoning death of Christ. There is no gospel, no one can be saved without believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But the point here is those things, as important as they are, and as of first importance, even those things are not before all things.

And let me explain why. Because behind salvation by grace alone, behind the cross, behind the resurrection, is the Trinity, is the God of the Bible, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Jehovah Witnesses believe in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Mormons believe in the resurrection.

[36 : 18] There are others that believe in salvation by grace alone. Muslims believe in an omnipotent, omniscient, sovereign, eternal God.

But none of them are Christian. None of them have the gospel. None of them have the gospel in the right way. The only gospel that can save.

What makes Christianity absolutely distinct is the identity of our God, of who we were worship.

Who saves us? That is the thing that stands before all things. It's God himself. Does that make sense? If we don't have this God correct, nothing else after that is going to be right.

So what God saves? What God sent forth Christ as a propitiation? who raised him from the dead?

What God saves by grace alone through faith alone? The bedrock of our faith is God himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[37 : 27] And so if you don't understand, if you don't have him, then you can't be saved. The salvation is of the Lord.

You don't know life because this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God in Jesus Christ whom he sent. So there's no eternal life apart from knowing God, who is a Trinity.

We can't just leave it at God. We just can't leave it at God. I believe in God. Muslims believe in God.

Allah is similar in some respects to the God of the Bible. I just listed. He's sovereign. He's eternal.

He's loving. He's powerful.

He's all of these things. But listen to what the Quran says. Say not Trinity. For God is one God.

Glory be to him for far exalted is he above having a son.

[38 : 35] Say he Allah is one. Allah is the one on whom all depend. He begets not, nor is he begotten, and none is like him. Allah is a single person God.

He's a single person God. And the God of the Bible is a Trinity. Now that's more than a numerical difference. The fact that Allah is a single person God changes everything about him.

it defines the kind of person or character he's going to be. They can say he's loving, but you know what?

They can't say he is love. Loving is one of the 99 titles of Allah. He's loving. But there was a time when he did not love because there was no one to love.

Or if he did love, he loved himself. selfishly. And that changes everything. And that's why Islam is not grace. It's harsh legalism.

[39 : 45] Because Allah inherently cannot be a God who pursues relationships with other people. Seeks graciously to love them and meet them where they are.

He might be compassionate offhand, but that's not who he is. He is not a God who naturally relates or is relating to others, always moving outside of himself in love.

And so that's why in Islam he is far above, he is exalted above all, and you just can't know him. And you really just need to do what he says.

Allah functions and exists in a completely different way than the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit does. And so that's why we can't leave things just at God.

We can't leave it as a mystery. For our own sake, for our own salvation, for the sake of God's glory, we have to love and appreciate the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who's not just loving, but he's love.

[40 : 50] And he's always been gloriously happy, gloriously good, gloriously full of outgoing love. all of the time he's been flourishing in outgoing love.

And that's what Roger's going to begin digging into next week. Well, our time is up. Let me pray very briefly and then we'll be dismissed. Heavenly Father, we are so glad that you have given us the Bible, that we might know you, that we might relate to you, that we might move towards you, and what we find is you moving toward us.

We find us not pursuing and seeking to understand you, but you reaching out to us, you being merciful to us, you revealing yourself to us.

Thank you that you are a God who loves and wants to be loved, who is known and wants to be known, who is enjoyed and wants to be enjoyed even more.

Lord, we do love you. Move us closer this week to you. I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.