

Trinity

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Date: 03 January 2016

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- [0 : 00] A few years ago, an Oxford-based thinker called James Martin published a book called *The Meaning of the 21st Century*.
And he suggested in that book, *The Meaning of the 21st Century*, that humanity stands at a great crossroads across the next hundred years or so. He outlines various problems, what he calls mega problems, that the world is going to face.
In the next hundred years or so. And he lists them. Poverty, extreme poverty, the growth of shanty towns, and all the social issues and problems that arise in urban poverty.
Food production. How are we going to feed 7.5 billion people and growing? Water shortages.
It's a very interesting book. And he gives some solutions to those problems. The point is that the decisions, he says, that are going to be made in the next few years are going to determine the longer future of the world and of human life in the world.
- [1 : 18] If we get those decisions right, then things will go well. If we get those decisions wrong about these big problems that the world faces, terrorism and all the rest, then we'll enter, he thinks, a new dark age.
So I don't know how you're looking at the year ahead. Those are some of the big problems. But in a group of people like this this morning, I would imagine that you're concerned with your own personal issues too.
Some of you will have cares and concerns, challenges, difficulties. You know how the last year went, 2015.
And the same sorts of things, almost inevitably, the same sorts of things, the same kinds of things that happened last year for better, for worse, for good or not.
Those are coming this year. And we have much to be thankful to God for. But there will be difficulties.
- [2 : 28] How are we going to trust him through that year? Now, one of the things that we can do is get a vision of God.
Get an understanding of God, the truth about God. So that our knowledge of God can be our guide in the year ahead.
And so what I want to do is try and think about the nature of God. It's a great help thinking about what God is like.
Who is God? What kind of God do we follow? What kind of God do we trust? So the magnificence of God. We're going to look at a few different passages.
John 14 was the reading. And there's some verses, John 14, verses 10 and 11, that, if you like, are the center of some of our thinking about the Trinity.
- [3 : 28] If you want to think about the nature of God, what kind of God this is that Christians believe in, then John chapters 14, 15, and 16 are some of the best places you can go in the Bible.

But I've produced an outline. You can have that, have a look at that. So if we're going to range around a bit and hopefully that will be a help to you.

Now the first thing when we think about God that we need to consider is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians, for God, for Christians rather, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord, that Jesus is Lord, is the first consideration, the first thing we need to bear in mind.

The New Testament speaks about Jesus as Lord more than a hundred times. The Lordship of Christ. And to say that Jesus is Lord, the word Lord, kurios, is the same word that was used in the Old Testament for Yahweh.

So to speak of Jesus as Lord is to say that he is God. It's to confess his deities, to confess his absolute divinity. So that's the place we start.

[4 : 53] To believe in Christ is to believe in the Trinity. And then the next thing, the most basic thing is to say, well, the Bible says that there is one God.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one. So there's exactly one God. And what's sometimes called the unity of God means that the God of Israel and the God of Jesus Christ is the only God.

He's the only true God. The world's creator. God himself declares that he alone, he alone is God. And there is no other.

That's where we start. The oneness, the oneness of God. That he alone is one. The question is, well, what does it mean to speak about God being one?

What kind of one, what kind of unity is it? And we find that it's a rich unity.

[6 : 05] It's an organic unity. Because we find that the Father is God and the Son is God and the Spirit is also God.

The Father is God. Jesus said the Father was Lord of heaven and earth. And God the Father sent the Son into the world.

So the Father is God. The Father's will is that we look to his Son, Jesus Christ, and that believing in him, we have the gift of eternal life.

And yet the Father, alongside the Father, the Son, also is God. The only Son from the Father who was in the beginning from God.

Remember those words from John chapter 1? The one through whom all things were made. No one has ever seen God. Yet the only God who is at the Father's side has made him known.

[7 : 12] So the Son is God. So together with the Father and the Son, we also have the Spirit. The Spirit is also God. The Holy Spirit is given by the Father through the Son.

The Spirit is sent from the Father by the Son. And the Spirit is equal to the Father and the Son in terms of his nature as God.

And we know that because of who he is and what he does. The Spirit can't be separated from the Father or the Son.

John 16, 14. Jesus said, The Spirit of truth will glorify me. He will take what is mine and declare it to you.

All that the Father has is mine. And therefore I said that the Spirit, he the Spirit, will take what is mine and declare it to you. So the Holy Spirit is on the exact same footing as the Father and the Son.

[8 : 29] Completely involved in everything that God the Father and God the Son are doing. But having said this, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, they're distinct from one another.

They're different to one another. They're not the same as one another. So they're equal to one another. And they're never divided.

They're never separated from one another. But they're different. Look at John 14, verses 16 and 17.

Jesus says, I will ask the Father, and he, the Father, will give you another helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.

And what I want you to notice there is that the Father is not the Son. And the Son is not the Father.

[9 : 29] They always come together, as it were. But they are not three terms. They're not three names for the same person.

They're distinct from one another. Later on, as Christians were reflecting on these teachings in the Bible, they, in 362, it's a history lesson for you, in 362 in northern Africa, in a place called Alexandria, in present-day Egypt, came up with the catchphrase that God, the God of the Bible, is one being, three persons.

One being, three persons. Now, to be a person, what is it to be a person? What does it mean when we say God is a person?

When we say God is personal, what do we mean? When we say the Father is a person, the Son is a person, the Spirit is a person, what do Christians mean when they say that?

Well, to be a person is to gain our identity from our relationships with others. So who we are is always bound up with where we stand in our relationships with others.

[10 : 56] So the Father is personal. To be a person is to be loved and known by another person. And that is the case for God.

The Father is personal. The Father, it says in John 15, loves the Son. And in loving the Son, the Father is who he is.

The Father is never without the Son. The Son is never without the Father. And this is true of the Holy Spirit as well. They are never who they are as divine persons without one another.

The Father is personal. The Son is personal. The Spirit is personal. They are unique divine persons.

they are not separate. They are one. So in John 14, verse 9, see this? It can't be separate.

[12 : 03] The Father and the Son can't be separated from one another. Look at verse 9. To see Jesus is to see the Father. To know Jesus is to know the Father.

To be loved by Jesus is to be loved by the Father. And here's the key. Remember I said verse 10. If you want one verse, one statement to take away with you this morning, let's make it verses 10 and 11.

Jesus says, the Father dwells in him. It's one of the most important statements in the entire Bible about who God is.

the Father lives in the Son. And the Son lives in the Father. The Spirit of truth, the Spirit comes from the Father.

And that's the same thing as the Father and the Son coming. So when Jesus promises to send the Spirit, he says, we'll make our home with you.

[13 : 15] The Father and the Son will come through the Spirit and they'll dwell with you. They'll be with you. I will not leave you as orphans.

Verse 17. I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you when Jesus comes. Verse 23. When Jesus comes, he'll come by the Spirit.

And the Father will come and they will make themselves at home with those who love them. So the Spirit's presence, the Spirit's indwelling is bringing the Son and the Father together with them.

And verse 10. I am in the Father, Jesus explains. The Father is in me. The Father dwells in me.

Later on, he says, I am in my Father. Later on, even in chapter 70, he says, you, Father, are in me and I in you.

[14 : 27] So, the Father and the Son, they live in one another. they live through one another.

They penetrate one another. They permeate one another. They cannot be separated from each other. Their life, the Father, the Son and the Spirit, who they are is completely bound up.

They exist in and through one another. And it's only ever been so. It's one of the most important statements in the Bible. They dwell in one another.

Father, Son and Spirit, they live in one another. They exist in and through each other. They're never separated from each other.

So that is the ultimate nature of reality. There's nothing more ultimate than God. And in these statements, Jesus is opening up, if you like, the ultimate nature of God, the ultimate being of God.

[15 : 30] And he's saying, this is what God is like. we live in and through and by one another. So there's one God. Let's just try and pull this together.

There's one God. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are each fully God. They are personal. They're persons. They're distinct from one another.

But they're never separated from one another. They live in and through each other in perfect love and unity. But what difference, what difference does this all make?

So let's think through some of the implications of this Christian biblical understanding of God, Father, Son, and Spirit living in and through each other.

Now, there's no bigger, I said at the beginning, there's no bigger teaching than the Trinity in Christian faith. There's no bigger teaching. It is the, if you like, the overarching idea of all Christian faith.

[16 : 34] It helps us understand the Bible. It helps us understand Christian experience. It helps us understand salvation, how we are forgiven, brought into God's family.

First and most important thing that the Trinity teaches us is the nature of God's love. See, when the Father and the Son and the Spirit reveal themselves in history, we, they come into view in history and then we see something of what they have been doing, what they are like in all eternity.

Turn to John 17. So if you've got John 14, 10, as in and through, they live in and through one another. And then in John 17, one of the most profound statements that we have in the entire Bible about what was God doing before he created the world.

look at verse 21. Jesus is praying, isn't he? And he asks the Father that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us.

And then verse 23 of chapter 17, I in them, look at this, I in them, and you in me, that the world may know that you sent me, and love them even as you loved me.

[18 : 24] That's an amazing thing. Jesus is teaching us here that the love that the Father shows towards each one of us is the same kind of love with which the Father, the Eternal Father, loves the Father the Eternal Son.

So the love between the Father and the Son was what was happening before creation. I think that's the only statement in the Bible which speaks about what the Lord was up to before he brought the world into existence, before he created.

If you can think of others, let me know. They were loving one another, they were giving and receiving love from one another. And then verse 24, you gave me glory, they were giving one another glory and honour because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

So the Trinity says, well, there is an eternal depth, there is eternal dimension to the love of God. Love isn't something that God does, although of course he does things because he is loving.

the love of God is what God is. In fact, Father, Son and Spirit have been giving and receiving love in all eternity.

[19 : 51] What does it mean to love? What do you do when you love someone? What does it mean that God loves you? That God loves us?

What does it mean? It means that you place value, value, you give value to another, that you place value on another, and that in doing that, you become who you are.

Giving and receiving love. So that's the first, I think it's the most important thing that a Christian understanding of God as Trinity tells us. It tells us about the nature of God's love as essential to who God is.

And the second thing that the Trinity tells us is that all of reality, because God is personal and because God himself is Father, Son and Spirit, is who he is in relationship to other divine persons.

It tells us that all of reality is personal and relational. So the world begins in relationships. The purpose of creation, of God's work of creation, is fellowship.

[21 : 19] Relationship shared between persons. Ultimate reality, what is the world like? Well, ultimate reality is personal relationship.

love. God's being, God's nature, is interpersonal love. And he is the one upon whom this world rests for its existence.

He is the creator. So creation has a personal goal, a personal beginning, and it has a personal goal. So think about this for a second.

Everything that exists in this world and in the next, in the world to come, everything that exists is either a functioning relationship of love and honor.

We spoke about Jesus as righteousness. That means our relationships are morally structured. That's what it means. Everything that exists is either relationships that work, that are functioning, or relationships that are doomed to destruction.

[22 : 28] so we learn. The second thing we learn is that God has relationship in himself. Trinity teaches us that, that God has relationship in himself and that the values of relationships belong to reality in its most absolute ultimate form.

So what is it to be in touch with reality? Do you feel that you are in touch with reality? What does it mean to be in touch with reality? To be in touch with reality means to be in relationship, in right relationship with God and with other people, connected to others, connected to God, connected to other people.

then you are in touch with reality in its ultimate absolute form. Now, the third thing that Trinity shows us is teaching about God as three and one and one and three is that God is father.

He really is father in all eternity. So God did not become father when he created the world. Of course he is the father of creation.

But God's father, God's fatherhood is permanent. It's eternal in God. So when we come to Christ, when we put our trust in Jesus Christ, when we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, our sins are forgiven, what happens?

- [24 : 18] We're brought into God's family. And God's family, God's family is when he opens up the love that he shares with his son in all eternity and he welcomes us into that.
- He adopts us and makes us his children. He becomes my father. He becomes your father. He becomes our father father. Because he is father in an everlasting relationship with the son.
- So he opens up that relationship with the son. Remember Jesus' statement? That the love that you shared with me may be in them. That's what's happening.
- The fatherhood of God, he welcomes us, he's a family, God is a family man if you like. He welcomes us into his family. The Trinity then also gives us an understanding about the nature of our humanity.
- What it is to be human, created after God's image and likeness. So we, as human beings, are created in the image of a God who is three in one and one in three.
- [25 : 36] And that love which is given and received, the honor and the glory that is received from one to the other, is what it means to be human.
- We become human not when we serve ourselves, but in when we place value on others and give them honor. When we serve others with devotion, so you think of all the, think of all the, how does this work in practice?
- Think of all the highest moral values in the world. Justice, wisdom, goodness, faithfulness, courage. They're all personal values.
- They're all bound up in relationship to others. And this is so because God, in whose image we are created, is interpersonal loving relationship.
- that is the essence of God. You don't get anything more essential to God. And as we're creatures made in his likeness, so too that the relationships are the essence of our existence.
- [26 : 52] Remember John 1 John, that statement, we love, it says, because he first loved us. So the Trinity teaches us that our nature, our nature as individual people, is found as we are concerned, as it's fulfilled, it's made complete in our concern for others, in caring for others, in serving others.
- That's why loneliness is so destructive. That's why pride, again, is so destructive. it's why selfishness and isolation from others damages us.
- Now, the last thing, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit serve us. The Trinity shows us how the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, each one of them serves us at the cross, at the death of God's Son, at the crucifixion.
- I said at the beginning, I think, that the Trinity, without the Trinity, there's no forgiveness. That's quite something.
- What happens, you think, to the Trinity when Jesus dies? When Jesus dies, we know he bears the sins, he died for our sins.
- [28 : 18] He bears our sins as he dies on the cross. He bears away the sins of the world. So, what happens when the Son dies horribly, is executed, is put to death?
- Does the Father reject the Son? Does the Father curse the Son? Does the Father damn the Son? Are the Father and the Son separated from one another at the cross as Jesus bears our sins?
- Jesus was the Trinity broken at the cross? Remember, we've spoken about the nature of God, God's love, eternal love, shared, given, received between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.
- So, was that ruptured? Did that come to an end when Jesus died? I think the answer is no. the Father, remember, dwells in the Son, and the Son dwells in the Father.

They live in and through one another. Jesus said, I'm not alone, the Father is with me, as he faces the cross.

[29 : 37] I'm not alone, the Father is with me. Remember, as he hangs on the cross, in Luke's account, Jesus entrusts himself to the Father. He says, Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.

In Matthew, you have, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Now, that cannot mean that the Father, the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is broken.

Because to say that the relationship between the Father and the Son is broken would be to say that God goes out of existence, which is impossible.

the Father does forsake the Son, not in the sense that he is separated from the Son. The Father abandons the Son in that he abandons him to the cross, he abandons him to death, he abandons him to bear the penalty of sin, he abandons him to bear God's judgment, not in the sense that the Father stops dwelling with him.

So the Father gives up the Son to suffer and to die for our sins. So at the cross the relationship between the Father and the Son is unbroken.

[31 : 04] Throughout the Passion Jesus remains the beloved Son. Remember that statement, there's an interest, what was the Spirit doing at the cross. So the Father gives the Son, he abandons the Son to bear the penalty for sin, for the judgment that we deserve, that we can be forgiven and changed.

So where was the Spirit at the cross? There's one statement in the Bible I know of that speaks about that. It's Hebrews 9 14, when it says that the Son offered himself to God through the eternal Spirit.

Speaking about the death of Christ, you have the Father and the Son and the Spirit working together, undivided, never separated from one another at that point too.

So the death of Christ is the measure of God's love for us. Father, Son and Spirit, they work together in the Son's death for the sins of the world.

And of course, that makes our adoption into God's family possible. That's how God himself serves us. That's how we receive forgiveness, we're adopted into his family, he welcomes us into his family, he becomes our father, my father and yours.

[32 : 35] so how does that come today? How does that come to us today? Well, through the Spirit. The Spirit is the one who makes the father and the son present to us here today, this morning.

Have you ever thought about the Spirit? What does it mean? What does it mean for the Spirit? What does it mean to be Spirit? What is it? What is Spirit?

The Spirit is, you have a Spirit, God has a Spirit, and your Spirit is joined to God's Spirit. Now the Spirit is personal power, personal energy without a body.

That's what a Spirit is. And that means that God can go through time without being bodily present. Well, these are great thoughts.

Spirit is God present with us now and always. So because of the Trinity, we know and understand the depth of God's love as eternal and essential to who God is.

[33 : 53] We can know that all reality is ultimately personal and relational. we can call God Father because he really is Father in all eternity.

We recognize by the Trinity, we understand that to be human is to be bound up in relationship to God and others.

God and then by the Trinity also we can see how God serves us, delivering us from sin in the death of Christ. So as we set out into the new year with all the opportunities, with all the difficulties, with all the concerns, let's just keep the magnificence of this biblical teaching in our hearts and minds.

God as one and three, the Father who loves you, the Son who gave himself to die for you, that your sins might be forgiven, that you might be welcomed into his family, and the Spirit who will be with you now, the Spirit is the one who is God with us now and always.

in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.