

# The Triune God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, and lovely to see you all. Let me add my word of welcome to Martin and others. My name is James, and I'm on the staff team here at St. Silas. And if you're new to St. Silas, our normal pattern is to work through the Bible bit by bit, no bit skipped.

And that is because we believe that the Bible is God's Word, and therefore every bit is important. But at the moment, we're going through some studies on who God is. And so last week, we considered the majestic God, and this week, we're looking at the glorious triune God.

And so this morning, we're really considering that God, although he is one substance or one goodness, he is three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And so let me pray for us as we begin. Father God, we thank you that you are three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Please, won't you use these moments to help us to know and to love you better? Amen.

Well, I wonder if you saw the James Corden skit this week that he did with his father, Malcolm, about how to hold the Bible. And it's really a very amusing skit.

[ 1 : 11 ] But the bit that got me was the last off-the-cuff remarks between the father and son there. So dad, Malcolm, says to his son, love you loads. And then James replies, love you, buddy.

And I was absolutely broken at that point. And it kind of knocks your socks off, doesn't it? Well, it does me, at least. Because you feel that in that moment, you're getting the very briefest glimpse into their relationship in the most unguarded and real way.

And in the same way, in our reading this morning, we're getting an unguarded glimpse into the very heart of the Trinity and into Jesus' prayer for us. So you should feel very privileged this morning.

I hope you do. And at the heart of the universe is a triune God who's infinitely happy within his persons, loving and being loved, and who is totally united and content.

And as Christians, we are invited into this infinitely loving relationship. But first, what do I mean by triune?

[ 2 : 19 ] What do I mean by Trinity? Here's a definition for those more analytical folk amongst us. I've just nicked this from Tim Keller, so I'll give him credit there.

God is one being, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All equally God, who know and love one another.

I'll say that again. God is one being, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All equally God, who know and love one another.

And the section of John's Gospel that we're looking at this morning is Jesus' great prayer to his Heavenly Father the night before he dies. And so he's facing the cross, execution, and death.

And Jesus prays to God. And it's a prayer that's overflowing with love and joy in the Holy Spirit. And he is rejoicing in his Father's love for him.

[ 3 : 19 ] And that rejoicing in that love is like a Niagara Falls of love that is washing over him. And so in our reading this morning, Jesus also prays for us.

So if you've closed your Bibles, just open them up again. And just open them back up to chapter 17 and look down at verse 26, the very last verse in our reading. And what's he saying?

Jesus is praying to his Heavenly Father that we would be included and that we would experience this Niagara Falls of love that the Father has for the Son.

And so Christianity is less about mastering a set of beliefs. But if you are a father or a mother listening this morning, it's about sitting at God the Father's feet and learning to love the Son like a perfect Father.

And if you are a son and daughter listening this morning, it's about learning to love the Father like the eternal Son, Jesus, loves his Heavenly Father.

[ 4 : 38 ] That's what Christianity is about. And so the plan for us this morning is to just pick out three reasons that give us confidence in Jesus' prayer for us.

That we can be certain and sure that this is something that we can pray and believe in with full confidence and delight. And the first one there is the glorious triune God is an eternal God. And then he is a united God. And then thirdly, we'll look at that he is a glorifying and giving God. So the glorious triune God is an eternal God.

He is a united God. And then finally, we'll consider he is a glorifying and giving God. I've kind of sneaked in two in the last point there, but maybe you'll forgive me. So our first point there, the glorious triune God is an eternal God.

And our key verses here are in verse 5 and 24. And I'll just read them for us. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

[ 5 : 43 ] And then again, verse 24. Father, I want those who you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me, because you loved me before the creation of the world.

So if you're a regular at St. Silas, you would have noticed the Nicene Creed on the wall behind me. And it reads there, And all that begotten language there is simply a fancy way of saying that Jesus was not created, but that he has always been there, just like God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is exactly like God of one substance. And Jesus is praying here that the Father would return him to that eternal, forever glory in heaven, rather than leaving him in the veiled glory of earth. And so the picture that is presented in these verses is of the Father, Son, and Spirit existing in glory, in eternity, before the creation of the world, and long after the world disappears. And the plan in eternity has been that we, you and I, would see Jesus' glory, and be with him in eternity, and see the eternal love that the Father has for the Son.

[ 7 : 25 ] And so the Christian life is really a call to eternity. Just look down at verse 2. That he may give eternal life to those you have given him.

And so Jesus is giving eternal life to those that the Father has given him. But eternity might be something that is quite hard for us to get our minds around. And that's because our world is very much geared towards the immediate.

What you can get now, live for the moment, because soon the moment will be gone. But the glorious triune God is an eternal God, and his love and life that he offers us is an eternal love and an eternal life that only he can give.

And notice here that the way into eternal life is by knowing the Father and the Son. Just look down at verse 3. Now this is eternal life, that they know you and the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Now, normally at this time of year, I would be looking forward to the Tour de France. I love watching it as an armchair expert. And often I'd say stuff like, Nebelie should be doing that, or Thomas should make his break now.

[ 8 : 42 ] And where is Quintana this year? Yet again, he hasn't performed. And you suspect, by the way that I'm talking about it, that I know what I'm on or out. But truth be told, I'm pretty clueless.

You see, unless I've cycled up the Col de Tourmalen, after 200 kilometers, and after two weeks on the tour, I wouldn't know what it really involves to take the yellow jersey.

And so by knowing here, Jesus means living side by side with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, day by day in trust and obedience through grit and guts.

And so the application for us here this morning is, do we know the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? And are we living for eternity?

The next reason for confidence that Jesus calls us into the love that the Father has for the Son is effective is that the Trinity is gloriously united.

[ 9 : 46 ] And our key verses there are verses 20 and 21, and then 22 and 23. I'll just read them again for us. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one.

Therefore, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you. And then 22. I have given them glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.

I in them, and you in me, so that they may be brought to complete unity. And the idea is that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are equally God, of the same Godness, equal in honor, but that they exist in three different persons.

And as three persons, they are united in purpose, will, and action. So here's the theologian A.W. Toes on this.

He says, that the persons of the Godhead, being one, have one will. They work always together, and never the smallest act is done by one without the agreement of the other two.

[10:59] Every action is done by the Trinity in unity. So we may be tempted to say, oh, well, I like the Jesus God, but the Old Testament God I am less keen on.

Or we might look at the cross and see that as cosmic child abuse, and that Jesus had to be somehow unwillingly dragged there to go to the cross. But Jesus says here, that where he is, the Father is.

And where the Father is, the Holy Spirit is likewise. Jesus willingly goes to the cross with the agreement of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Here is how the author of the Hebrews puts it in chapter 9, verse 14. How much more then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, that's God the Father, cleanse our consciences from acts that leads to death, so that we may serve the living God. But although they are united and they have equal honor, they are not of equal order. You see, what makes the Father the Father is that he is always eternally the Father.

[12:16] And what makes the Son the Son is that he is always eternally the Son. And what makes the Spirit the Spirit is that he is always eternally the Spirit.

And so, where Jesus prays that we might be where he is and experience the Niagara Falls love that the Father has for the Son, we can be certain that this will be done as this is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit's will for us.

They're in complete agreement in this and they're all working towards it. And the goal of Christian unity is that we reflect the unity of God.

And this unity is incredibly attractive. Just look at what he says at the end of verse 23. And so that they may be brought to complete unity, then the world will know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

And so, one of the marks of Christian maturity is how much we love and are united to other Christians. Do we love other Christians unconditionally simply because they have been loved by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

[13:31] Or is our love conditional based on attractiveness, on class, on similar life, age, and stage, or race, or how funny they are?

A couple of years ago, I served in the Marines. And when I was going through training, there was one chap in our troop who wasn't particularly well-liked. He was a chap called JP.

And I remember going on this one exercise. In every exercise, you'd have to buddy up with someone. And I got into the harbor position, the camping place, a bit late, and there was only one person left to buddy up with and camp with.

And that was this chap, JP. And he was incredibly unpopular. He had a dry sense of humor, really caustic wit, seemed to always be grumpy.

And so I wasn't very much looking forward to it. But having spent three days camping with him, cooking meals, going through this great adventure that we're going through together, I grew in my appreciation and affection for him as a mate.

[14:37] And so sometimes, the things that offend us about someone become the things that we find most endearing. And so long as we're prepared to give them a chance to go out and speak to them, we find that we actually get on with them really well.

Well, how much more so is that for those who have been called together and united by God through the Holy Spirit, believing in Jesus, into one family, God and family.

But I think on this unity, we're particularly confused about this today because essentially, we are people who believe in salvation by works.

So we talk a lot about inclusivity and about tolerance and marching for that and the next thing, up until the point that someone does something that we disagree with and then we slam them.

But the gospel says, come as you are, in your brokenness, and be united. Be whole again, as God is united, happy and content.

[15:45] Come into the Niagara Falls of love that the Father has for the Son. And the big thing that God is doing in the world is that he is making one united people from every tribe, tongue and nation, from all classes, every situation, loving and being loved by the Lord Jesus, the Father and the Holy

Spirit.

And because they are united, we can have confidence in Jesus' prayer that we will be brought into this love because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are united.

And the third reason that we can have confidence that Jesus' prayer is something that we can pray and delight in and have confidence is, is that the glorious triune God is the glorifying and giving God.

And our key verses there are verses 1 and 2 of our reading. And I'll just read that again for them.

Okay. Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.

For you granted him authority over all people, that he might give eternal life to those you have given him. And then again, in verse 6, I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world.

[17:02] They were yours. You gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. And the point is, well, I don't really need to explain the point to parents this morning.

You know exactly what this is like. You skimp and you save all year to buy that Christmas present for your son and daughter. and you wrap it up even though you're tired and you place it on the tree. And then Christmas morning comes and they rush downstairs and they see the present and they unwrap it. They rip off the wrapping paper and their eyes and faces explode in delight.

And it makes absolutely everything worthwhile in giving your child that gift. And so I remember growing up, some of the most endearing memories that I have of my father is often he'd walk through the front door with a twinkle in his eye and say, Jamie, I've got a present for you.

And it'd normally be something naff like a beaner or a dandy annual. No offense. But I'd love the present simply because my father had given it to me. And he had loved giving it because he could see the delight that I had in it.

[18:13] And the reason that we have been included in the love that the father has for the son is that God is the great giver. And he loves to give good gifts to his children.

And he loves to give us to Jesus. And Jesus loves to offer us back to his father. You see, we as God's family are that precious gift that have been included in that Niagara Falls of the father's love for the son.

And the father loves to give the son good gifts. But he also loves to honor and glorify the son. So cast your mind back there eight years to the Olympics in London 2012 and to the 200 meter butterfly final.

And I'll just remind you what happens there. In the race we've got the two, the defending champion Michael Phelps against the young upstart Chad LaClosse. And Chad LaClosse pips Phelps on the touch by one five hundredth of a second.

But more memorable than the victory was Chad LaClosse's father's reaction which was unbelievable! My beautiful boy! Look at him!

[19:25] You see, Bert LaClosse, Chad's father, loved to see his son honored. And how much more does our heavenly father love to see his son honored and glorified?

You see, at the heart of the universe is a mutual honoring and glorifying between the father, son, and Holy Spirit. Just look down at verse 24 again.

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, to see my glory. That glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

You see, God gives Jesus glory, the glory you have given me. And the son loves to honor and glorify the father in return by wanting us, all of us, to see the glory that the father has given his son in eternity.

To see my glory. But how different is that to how we think about glory and how our perspective on glory operates? You see, we're all about promoting our own glory.

[20:34] We want a bigger house, we want a flashy car, we want more likes on social media, but the Trinity is all about glorifying and honoring others.

It's all about serving the other. And where do we see this most clearly? Well, we see it at the cross. You see, when John speaks about glory, he is always referring to the cross.

You see, where Jesus says, the hour has come, glorify your son, that the son may glorify you in verse 1 and 2, he's not saying, let's get the cross, the nasty bit, out of the way and done with, and then comes relaxation and glory.

But he is saying, on the cross, there, the glory of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is revealed. And it's a self-sacrificing glory that the Father would willingly offer up and give his only

beloved son to save a people who disown him and reject him so that they may experience the greatest love in the world, that Niagara Falls love that the eternal Father has for his son.

And then the son willingly gives up and lays down his glory and his life to save a people so that they may have eternal life and know the love of the Father for him.

[ 21 : 54 ] And it's a sacrifice and a service that is done for the other to glorify one another. And so, in conclusion, as we come into land, as we go through tough and uncertain times now, we can be sure that we're being washed over and included in the eternal love and joy that God the Father has for the Son, that Niagara Falls of love.

And we can be sure of that because the glorious triune God is an eternal God who calls us into eternal life. because he is the happy and contented and joyful God who is utterly united and instructs us to be united to reflect his unity and diversity.

And because he is the glorifying and giving God who gives us all good gifts as his dearly loved children and includes us in the glory that he gives us, gives his Son, calling us to be a generous and serving people.

Great, let's pray. Father, we thank you that you are a glorious triune God. We thank you for the Son and the Holy Spirit.

We thank you that we have been included in this great love, that you've opened up the very heart of the universe for us to see where we're going.

[ 23 : 21 ] Please help us to strive forward, to live for eternity and draw nearer to that day each day, day by day. Amen.