

Trinity Sunday 2023

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[0 : 00] Before we go any further, I'd love to commit this time to God in prayer, so invite us to bow our heads as we do that. God, we humbly come to you this morning asking that you open our hearts to hear your words and to think of you as you would have us, to speak of you as you want us to, to recognize that you have given us an insight into your own nature, that we may see you for who you really are and not contrive thoughts about you based on our own human creativity and imagination, but to draw from your word what your word teaches us about you.

I pray, God, that even as we explore this doctrine of the Trinity, that you will, by the same Holy Spirit that inspired these writings, now enlighten our hearts that we may know you, not just informatively, to be informed in the mind, but also to be transformed in our understanding of you, that we may know you and make you known as you really are.

We pray for your help. We pray for your spirit to guide us. We pray for your son to be glorified in everything that is said from this text. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The reason I wanted to focus on the Great Commission this morning is because, as an apologist, and one of the things that I do is that I do debates on doctrines pertaining to the Christian faith.

I belong to an apologetics ministry, and apologetics essentially is the defense of the Christian faith. And we encounter people with lots of questions, whether it's in the universities, whether it's in the churches, whether it's in just different religious organizations that invite us to come and explain a little bit more about Christianity.

[2 : 01] And we do that. We don't limit ourselves to just a church. I remember we were invited once by an atheist. They call themselves the Skeptics of Middle Georgia, which is an atheist organization in Atlanta, near Atlanta.

And so they invited us to come there and to do a presentation as well. And so we get invited to a lot of these kind of places where sometimes the setting is a little bit hostile, not like today, the kind reception we've received.

But in all of these things, what we want to do is to defend the gospel of Jesus Christ. We want to do that respectfully, as Pastor Brian pointed out. We want to do that biblically.

And one of the biggest challenges that a lot of people in ministry that when we've come across talk about that they struggle with is the doctrine of the Trinity.

And so what some have done is to kind of move the doctrine of the Trinity away as if it's some non-essential, right? You know, let's focus on Jesus died and that Jesus was buried and Jesus rose again.

[3 : 04] And let's stick to that. That's the gospel. Let's keep the Trinity out of this. That's for those who want to go to Bible school. And I'm simply going to say that that's not true. The doctrine of the Trinity affects the very heart of the gospel.

You take the doctrine of the Trinity away, you have a different gospel. And if there's anything we've learned from Galatians chapter 1, a different gospel is no gospel at all.

And so whether we're dealing with the unbeliever or whether we're dealing with believers, the doctrine of the Trinity is central. And what better place to look at or to see that reflected than in the Great Commission itself?

Because the Great Commission at the end of the Gospel of Matthew is when Jesus finally sends out his disciples. And as we explore this text, we want to know what is it that Jesus wants his disciples to do when it comes to discipleship?

Does he just want them to go around telling people that I'm here to heal you? I was in Fiji just last week. Well, the week before.

[4 : 08] Yeah, last week. But eight days ago, I was in Fiji. And I was speaking to someone who at the end of one of our conferences there came up to me and said, well, you know, I'm very eager to preach the gospel, but I never preach about those doctrinal stuff, you know.

I preach that Jesus loves you, and I preach that Jesus wants to heal you. That's what I preach. And I said, but what about, you know, what the Bible teaches about who Jesus is and, you know, the Trinity, or even the concept of judgment that we, you know, the Father's judgment on those who don't believe?

What about those things? And he says, I don't care about those doctrinal stuff. I just want to communicate the love of Jesus to them. And friend, that is an incomplete gospel.

Yeah, I mean, certainly Jesus loves people. We don't deny that. But we want to communicate the gospel, and we come to the Great Commission where we are told how to make disciples. It's not just telling people that Jesus loves you and has a plan for your life.

That's not it. It's in telling people the full gospel. And so we come to the Great Commission where Jesus tells us how we ought to do discipleship. And central to the Great Commission, as we're going to see, is the doctrine of the Trinity.

[5 : 26] And so what I want to do today is to kind of, I've preached on this text many different times, but I'm going to approach this from an angle that I've never approached it before because it is Trinity Sunday.

I'm going to ask the question as a topic. What does the Great Commission teach us about God? What does the Great Commission teach us about God?

So we start with verse 16. Now, 11 disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. Verse 17 says, Now, when we talk about the Great Commission, we usually start with verse 19, which is, Go therefore make disciples of all nations.

But the context preceding that command is so important because the context preceding the Great Commission is that Jesus is, number one, worshipped, and on the other hand, doubted.

Did the disciples doubt Jesus? Yes. In fact, he did. One of the things that I teach when I teach in seminary about the defense of the Christian faith, especially on the resurrection, is one of the questions I love to ask them is this, What is the strongest evidence for the resurrection?

[6 : 53] Now, let's do that thought experiment a little bit. What is the strongest evidence of the resurrection? And typically, the answers I receive are, so you may have it. Now, what I'm doing is, let's do a bit of a show of hands here, to see what I've kind of got you.

If you were to ask, if you were asked, What is the strongest evidence for the resurrection? How many of you thought of the empty tomb? Can I see your hands? Yeah, a few of you have.

All right, thank you. How many of you thought that Jesus appeared to the disciples, and they were willing to die for it? That is the strongest evidence. Can I see your hands? Yeah, a few more of you, that one. There's a song that goes, Because He Lives Within My Heart.

How many of you thought of that song? Okay, no one. All right. So, but the point is, that when you talk about the resurrection, typically people would say the empty tomb is one of the biggest evidence for the resurrection.

Some people would say that Jesus' appearance to His disciples, or that they were willing to die for Him. Those were the big, you know, the evidence for the resurrection. Some even would say that the fact that historians record the death of Christ outside the Bible, here's where I find, when you look through the Gospels, particularly Luke 24, the greatest evidence for the resurrection was not the empty tomb.

[8 : 11] Why? The disciples saw the tomb empty. Did they jump to the conclusion that Jesus had been raised from the dead? No. In fact, what's so astounding in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24, is that when Jesus appears to the disciples, their first impression is that they saw a ghost, a spirit.

I mean, we would think that Jesus just appears. People would do that. No. Even with Jesus right in front of them, Luke 24 tells us, they thought they saw a spirit.

And so what Jesus begins to do, he says, why do doubts arise in your hearts? You know, he begins to challenge them. And he even asks them for fish, so that he can prove to them. He says, see, my hands and my feet, that it is I, for a spirit has no flesh and bones, as you see that I do.

And so Jesus is convincing his disciples. Imagine this. The risen Lord is convincing the disciples that he is the risen Lord. These are the guys that are supposed to be leading the church.

They doubted. And at the end, Luke 24, verse 44, tells us how Jesus cures their doubt. He says to him, this is what I, Luke chapter 24, verse 44, this is what I told you while I was still with you, that all that was written about me in the law of Moses and the Psalms and the prophets had to be fulfilled.

[9 : 33] Luke 24, verse 45, then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. So Jesus uses the scriptures, the words of God, to help them cure their unbelief.

It's not in the science, it's not in the evidence, it's not in the external manifestations, but the internal testimony of the word of God that cures the unbelief.

And so we're coming today to the question of the Trinity and you see that even when these disciples approach Jesus, the text tells us they doubted.

That's consistent with the gospel of Luke. These guys would doubt even if they are looking at Jesus. But on the other hand, Jesus is also worshipped. So you've got worship to Jesus and you've got doubt at Jesus.

Now what is the significance of Matthew mentioning this in passing? Was he just giving us that information on the side like, oh, just so you know, FYI, some people also doubted him while others worshipped. I think there's a little bit more to this.

[10 : 37] What is the significance of telling us that Jesus was worshipped? It teaches us that Jesus is God. Why? Well, interestingly, Matthew has a very interesting use of mountains as his, oh, oh, well, elevated places for his gospel motif.

Where's the first place in the gospel of Matthew that he talks about the mountain? It's actually at the temptation of Jesus where Satan takes Jesus to this mountain and he begins to show Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and Satan says to Jesus, all this I will give to you if you would worship me.

Ah, that's where we heard about worship. I will give you the kingdoms if you worship me. And what does Jesus say to Satan? Well, he says to Satan, pull up my text here, he actually is going to quote scripture, well, he quotes Deuteronomy, but Jesus essentially is going to build upon the law which says you shall worship no one else but God alone.

Right, in fact, the Old Testament makes that very clear that we cannot worship anyone else apart from God. Pull this up. In Exodus chapter 34 verse 8, the text tells us that Moses quote, bowed his head towards the earth and worshipped God.

Okay, quote, end quote, God on Mount Sinai. That's Exodus 34 verse 8. If you read down to verse 14, it says, quote, you shall worship no other God, end quote.

[12 : 16] So, Moses is commanded, you will worship no other God. That command is repeated in Deuteronomy and Jesus is citing this to Satan when Satan says, worship me.

Jesus is saying, you cannot worship anyone but God alone. Which is strange because two chapters ago, if you go to Matthew chapter 2, Jesus himself was worshipped as a baby.

The wise man came from afar to worship him. Matthew's gospel begins with the worship of Jesus. Now, why is this Jesus two chapters later saying, you cannot worship anyone else but God alone?

Because Jesus is God. He is God in every sense of the word. We read that true God of true God. So, whatever God is, Jesus is as well in terms of divine nature and divine qualities.

That's what the Great Commission teaches us even before we get to the Great Commission that Jesus is worthy to be worshipped. The same Jesus who on that mountain says, no one is to be worshipped but God alone now receives worship as God.

[13 : 29] So, the Great Commission teaches us that Jesus is to be worshipped. Number one. Number two, verse 18, and Jesus came and said to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Now, that's strange because on the first point, what does the Great Commission teach us about God? We see that Jesus is worshipped as God. And you would remember that Satan's offer to Jesus is that he would give Jesus the kingdoms of the world.

But now Jesus, having received worship, says, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, it's already mine. But if Jesus is God, why does it have to be given to him?

I mean, isn't it his? These are some of the questions that people would ask. And so, what we're left to do here in the Great Commission is to pause in a moment and say, what does it mean to say that Jesus is worshipped as God so that when Jesus says to Satan, worship no one but God alone, he means himself.

I alone am worthy to be worshipped and of course we know the Father and the Spirit and now he's coming here and saying, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. The meaning of that is this, God is more than one person.

[14 : 48] God is more than one person. Sometimes people say it this way, there are three persons in God. I'm not a big fan of saying it that way because it's, it kind of implies that there's one third God, one third, one third, you know, one third Father of God, one third of God is Father, one third of God is Jesus.

That's not how the Bible portrays it. Rather, the Bible portrays it as God is three persons. God is three persons. So that Jesus, on the one hand, is worshipped as God, on the other hand, Jesus receives the authority from the Father so that there is a relationship, an interpersonal relationship within the Trinity itself, which is so profound that it goes beyond our human understanding sometimes.

We try to comprehend it and we're left and shrouded. We know that this thing is shrouded in mystery. We don't fully get it. But we know it doesn't contradict any form of logical laws or principles.

Because to say that God is one being and three persons, it's not a contradiction. It would be a contradiction if we claim that God is three beings and one being. That is a contradiction.

Or if we say that God is one person and three persons, that would be a contradiction. But to say that God is one being and yet three persons is no contradiction at all.

[16 : 16] It just transcends what we understand about beings. Granted, we are human beings, finite creatures. So when you come to this text, we're seeing that Jesus receives this.

The other thing to keep in mind is that Jesus receives this authority as man. From all eternity, the Bible, John 1 tells us that Jesus creates all things. All things were made by him, through him, for him.

He is before all things. In him, all things hold together. Colossians chapter 1 tells us. But here, Jesus attains the kingdom as man. As a man, exalted now before the Father.

Because when you read Philippians 2, verse 5, he has submitted himself. Though equal with God, he does not cling on to that equality. He empties himself by taking on this human nature and now the Father exalts him.

The Father exalts this man and Jesus now receives all authority in heaven and on earth. That's the basis for the Great Commission. And so some people are like, we don't want to get into this because we want to stick with the simplicity of the gospel.

[17 : 25] But in the very passage that Jesus describes the Great Commission, how we are to make disciples, these things are included too. And so we are left to come to terms that when we do discipleship, this is what God wants us to think about discipleship.

We can either say, God, I don't care about your words. I'm going to do it my way. Because I think that the gospel is too complex for people and we get a lot of people who say that. The message of, you know, the gospel is, if you go down this route, people won't understand it.

You have to keep the gospel simple for people is what I've heard. That's not true. You have to keep the gospel biblical. But Sam, if you do that, people are not going to understand.

Well, that's exactly what scripture says. 1 Corinthians 1.18. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1.18, Paul says, the message of the cross is foolishness to the world that is perishing.

But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. It goes on to say in the next verse, where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe?

[18 : 36] Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? But my friend will not think this is logical. My friend would think it makes no sense.

For in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through its wisdom. It pleased God through the foolishness of what we speak to save those who believe.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified. Folly to the, stumbling block to the Jews, folly to the Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the wisdom and the power of God.

So, we recognize that this message is going to be foolishness. It's okay. We've got to come into terms with recognizing that man in their own wisdom will not know God.

We come to know God by leaning on his wisdom, on his words. So let's not try to water down the gospel because even when the same, the apostle Paul who wrote that passage, he goes to Athens where all the philosophers are, he begins to preach the gospel to them.

[19 : 47] Acts chapter 17, verse 18. Some of the Stoic and the Epicureans began to dispute with him and they said, what does this babbler wish to say? Others said, he's a preacher of foreign divinities.

They said this because he was preaching Christ and the resurrection. So when Paul preached the gospel, people thought he was nuts. So why should it be any different when we preach the gospel?

We preach the gospel according to scripture, no matter what the world thinks. And so when recognizing Jesus receives his authority from the Father, this implies that God is more than one person.

And the rest of scripture teaches us, of course, that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now we come to the Great Commission itself. Go therefore, verse 19, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

So, how are we to make disciples? I said, number one, the Great Commission teaches us that Jesus is to be worshipped as God. Number two, that Jesus, that God is more than one person since Jesus receives authority from someone else in the Godhead.

[21 : 05] Verse 19, we are told that when one makes disciples, these people have to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, a gospel without the Trinity is an incomplete gospel. Now, please hear what I'm not saying. What I'm not saying is one has to quickly affirm the Nicene Creed before one, you know, is properly a Christian.

That's not what I'm saying. Right? That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is one cannot deny the Trinity and be a Christian. Christian. That's a big difference. There are lots of people in the church that don't have a proper understanding of Christianity.

I think discipleship helps us with that. Right? But it's a big difference, you would agree with me, when someone says, I believe Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I'm trying to understand it.

I'm struggling. As opposed to someone who says, I reject the doctrine of the Trinity. I reject Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's different. We're not talking about cognitive ignorance or cognitive innocence where people just have not taught through this enough.

[22 : 07] We're talking about cognitive denial where people say, I reject what the scriptures teach on this. And I think that if one is in cognitive denial, we cannot really be a Christian.

Not according to Jesus because the way in which one is to be identified as a Christian in the public declaration of the, through the ordinance or the sacrament of baptism, the way you do that is to be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

So in the Great Commission, we see that God is not just more than one person. God is three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now, verse 20 tells us, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

Central to the Great Commission is teaching people to observe everything that Jesus has commanded, which means that if we properly understand the Great Commission, we will not shy away from teaching people about the Trinity.

We will recognize that the doctrine of the Trinity begins in Genesis 1, where God says that, you know, he creates the world, the heavens, and the earth. The Spirit howls over the waters, and the Word creates.

[23 : 28] We know from John 1, 1, the Word is Jesus, the creative agent of God. We know the Spirit is mentioned in the first three verses of the Bible. We know that God, the Father, is alluded to, and in that same chapter it says, let us make man in our image.

There is a plural personal pronoun being applied there that some people would say, well, this is a linguistic device by the Hebrew. No, it isn't. We can demonstrate it's not.

God is speaking in the plural. Let us make man in our image. And so, we recognize from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 where it ends with the Spirit and the Bride say come and Jesus' own testimony, the Father is alluded to, you recognize that the Trinity is central to all of what the Bible teaches.

It's not just a small part of this passage or that passage. The whole focus of the Bible is to show us who God is and in the Great Commission we are told that if one wants to be a disciple of Jesus, they are to be taught to observe all that Jesus has commanded and since Jesus had a high view of Scripture and believed and taught that we should submit to God's Word, we should be prepared to teach all that the Bible teaches on God and when we do that, we inevitably arrive at the Trinity.

And finally, Jesus says this, I am with you always to the end of the age. The Gospel of Matthew begins with Jesus, you know, when you go to Matthew chapter 1, let me read this.

[25 : 07] Please go with me to Matthew chapter 1 and I want to read about the promise about Jesus. I want to read from verse 20.

This is where Joseph is struggling. He's struggling because he's found out that Mary is pregnant and he's thinking about what to do about it and this is the revelation he receives.

Verse 20, But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. Now, the apostle gives us a summary of what took place, gives us a biblical framework to look at this from verse 22.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Verse 23, Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel.

[26 : 30] Now, the apostle adds the translation in the Greek which means God with us. Now, why is it that when the text tells us Jesus is conceived through the Holy Spirit, that's what the angel is saying, the apostle finds the need to give us a commentary and in his commentary he's going to give us Isaiah chapter 7 where the promise of the virgin birth is there to give us a framework to look at Jesus' incarnation, that Jesus comes into, Jesus being born.

He's going to give us this framework and in this framework it says they shall call his name Emmanuel. Matthew is not satisfied. He wants to give you the translation because he wants us to pay attention to the meaning of the word Emmanuel.

That's significant to the gospel. The meaning of the word Emmanuel according to Matthew which means God with us verse 23. So the gospel of Matthew begins by telling us that Jesus' coming implies that God is with us.

What is the final verse of the gospel of Matthew? The one we just read. At the very end of the gospel of Matthew behold I am with you always even to the end of the age.

The gospel of Matthew ends with Jesus being with us always and then we stop and we say wait a minute I'm struggling here. Is the Holy Spirit with us or is Jesus with us?

[28 : 02] Or when it says God with us is it the Father with us? I'm confused which one is it? Well this is one more thing and I'll close with this.

When we think about the triune God this is what we ought to think about. They are in the one hand to be distinguished from one another but they are never separated from one another. I'll repeat that again.

When we think of our triune God we need to acknowledge that they are distinguished from one another while on the other hand they are never separated from one another. The Father is indwelt with the Son and the Son is indwelt by the Father.

Jesus says I am in the Father and the Father is in me. The Holy Spirit indwells Jesus. Jesus indwells the Holy Spirit. See in a triune God they mutually indwell one another despite being distinct persons.

So that when Jesus is on earth the Holy Spirit is indwelling him and so is the Father. And so wherever Jesus is the Father is and the Spirit is. And likewise when Jesus ascended he said he will send us his Holy Spirit to be with us while he is exalted to the right hand of the Father.

[29 : 14] Okay. If that's the case then the Holy Spirit is with us. It's not Jesus. Aha. But Jesus indwells the Holy Spirit so that the Holy Spirit is in with me.

Who else is with me? The Father and the Son are also with me. Jesus truly is God with us. And when we mean that Jesus is God with us when the Spirit of God is with us, it means we have not just the Son, we have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit indwelling us, mediated to us today in the presence of the Holy Spirit, but fulfilled and come to pass as a result of Christ's exaltation so that Jesus truly becomes Emmanuel, God with us.

It's a powerful thing to take in. And if you're thinking about that, I don't fully get this. That's okay. Neither do I. But the fact is, Scripture teaches it. And when we allow Scripture to speak, it shows us two things.

Number one, how profoundly majestic this God is, a God that we don't fully understand yet. And we're going to spend all of eternity, God willing, trying to process that in our finite minds.

It teaches us something else. We need to, if we want to know about God, learn about God through His Word, rather than by our own imaginations, our own theory, our own wisdom.

[30 : 34] God has to reveal to us who He is, because unless He does, we cannot know who He is. So in summary, what does the Great Commission teach us about God? It teaches that Jesus is to be worshipped, number one, as God.

It teaches us, number two, that there's more than one person. God is more than one person because Jesus receives authority as God. Number three, it teaches us also that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

That's central to the Great Commission. And finally, it teaches us that when we are indwelt by God, that is something that is accomplished by Jesus, and now we're indwelt with the Holy Spirit, who, when He comes, and since He is here, also mediates the presence between the Father, the Son, to us.

And so we live in the Son, and we live in Christ, while the Spirit of God indwells us. It's something profound to be able to take away. That's what the Great Commission teaches us, and that's the heart of disciple making, to teach people all of what scriptures teach.

Let's look to God in prayer, even as we close. God, we come before you, and it leaves so much of questions. It leaves so much of room for examination, but I pray that what was shared today drives us back to your word, that we want to study your word, and we want to declare your word, even if it does not fully make sense in our minds, recognizing, oh Lord, that truth doesn't always have to make sense to us, but we, God, have to learn to bow the knee to your word, to accept your word, whatever it teaches, and to recognize that you as creator are far beyond our imaginations or what our minds can produce.

[32 : 20] We're thankful, God, that you've given us an insight to understand the mystery, of the Trinity, as it is plainly spelled out in the sacred pages of Scripture, and we pray that even as we seek to be obedient to the Great Commission and make disciples, that you will help us never forget that the Trinity is central to disciple making, to show them who God is and how God can be made known to us in the work of Jesus Christ and in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

We pray you will help us, Father, do this faithful to Scripture. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen.