

The Triune God of the Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everybody, again. I think I've been able to get around to say hi to just about everyone today. It's good to see your faces. If you got a Bible, go ahead and turn to Mark, chapter one. We are in our second part of a very long series.

We're gonna be going through the gospel of Mark, which is the telling of a story of Jesus, his life, and his ministry. And if you are new and you were with us, we are very pleased that you were here with us and so glad that you're kind of on the front end of this series as well.

Those of you who are listening online, thank you for doing that. We're gonna start in verse nine of chapter one and just jump right into it. And I'm really excited about what we get to cover today.

And it says this. In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the spirit descending on him like a dove.

And a voice came from heaven, you are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased. The spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness and he was in the wilderness 40 days, being tempted by Satan.

[1 : 0 9] And he was with the wild animals and the angels were ministering to him. This is God's word. So last week we considered the significance of the gospel actually starting in the wilderness.

That's where it begins. It begins with this guy, John the Baptist. It actually doesn't start, specifically Mark's gospel, doesn't start with Jesus's birth. But John the Baptist here, he's out in the desert baptizing crowds in the Jordan River.

And these people didn't come to see this like sideshow freak show. Although I feel like John the Baptist tried his best to make it that way. When they describe him, he kind of sounds like a caveman, right?

He's wearing animal clothes, like wild, unkempt. He's eating locusts and honey and all that, right? But they don't come out for that. They're coming out because he is proclaiming a gospel of repentance, a good news of repentance through water baptism.

And so people are coming out for that. They're coming out and saying, man, God's doing this interesting new thing over here. And only God can do that. John the Baptist can't forgive sins. Only God can forgive sins. And people are coming out to receive that blessing from God.

[2 : 1 5] And so while this is a strange guy in a strange place and you think like, man, God, this is a weird way to start this whole thing. Actually, what we see is that historically, God's plans actually often begin in the wilderness.

It's the place of new beginnings, hope, and renewal. And we ended last week with this interesting, that verse ends with this thing of John the Baptist saying like, guys, there is somebody coming who is greater than me.

You think what I'm proclaiming is cool and God's doing a new thing. I am preparing the way for somebody even greater. I'm not even worthy to untie that dude's sandal. And that guy is gonna be coming.

He's gonna be baptizing you in the Holy Spirit. And for a Jew immersed in scripture, that was a claim to divinity. Whoever this man coming was, like could only be God because God is the only one who can dispense the spirit to his people.

And this outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a promise that actually going back into the prophecies about this Messiah, this messianic reign, this Messiah that was coming, it said it would accompany him, but it never really directly said this guy was gonna be able to be doing that.

[3 : 2 8] So the understanding was, yeah, this coming of the spirit was from God, but not directly from the Messiah himself. And so we see John kind of preparing the way, setting the stage for

Jesus to arrive, and now we see Jesus arrives.

But it's not with pomp and circumstance. It's not, he doesn't have like a whole entourage before him blasting trumpets, like rolling out red carpet for him. He comes, it says, as Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.

And the God of the gospel doesn't come how you expect. And that little phrase, Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee, we can really miss what it means. And I just wanna, allow me some poetic license here at the risk of bad exegesis.

And if you're a heresy hunter, just chill out. It's gonna be okay. I'm not gonna like take us in a very bad direction. But I just want us to step into that moment where John's baptizing people and Jesus arrives.

Let's say you're kind of, I don't know how it works. Maybe people were standing in a line, right? And you were waiting your turn to be baptized. And you turn and you ask the guy behind you, hey, who are you, where are you from? Oh, I'm Jesus of Nazareth from Galilee.

[4 : 36] That would have, you know, we don't understand today. We don't understand how unimpressive that would have been, right? Nazareth was not a place of notoriety.

In fact, it was used by Jesus's naysayers to discount his ministry and diminish his importance. My friend Donnie Griggs, he's the guy who started One Harbor Church years ago.

He's there, he leads the Moorhead site. He wrote a book called Small Town Jesus that points this out. Back then, calling somebody a Nazarene was throwing shade. It is like being called a redneck in New York City.

That is not meant as a compliment, right? Mark is using these descriptors for a reason. He is painting this picture of Jesus at the Jordan. And he's saying, hey, Jesus came.

He isn't a known entity at all. Nobody knows him. And he isn't impressive. He's just another guy in the crowd waiting to be baptized, which speaks to one of the aspects of why the gospel is actually hard to believe because the God of the gospel isn't who you expect him to be.

[5 : 36] And it would be one thing if God showed up exactly how we'd expect and prove himself according to our expectations, kind of fits in our box, but God doesn't operate that way. He is who he is, not who we want him to be.

And that's why at the top of God's prohibitions is that, hey, you can't make an image of me. You can't make a carved image. You can't make anything in my likeness. No man is able to do that. And we can't do that because he doesn't fit into any molds of our limited experience, our finite wisdom and knowledge because he's beyond our comprehension. It's actually one of the attributes of God is that he is incomprehensible.

And we do know some stuff about him, but what we know about him is according to the measure he's revealed himself. And that's it. I mean, think about, to help us understand this, think about Isaiah's vision.

In the book of Isaiah, chapter six, Isaiah has this vision of God in his glory. And part of that is there's these angels circling around him, calling to one another, holy, holy, holy, right?

[6 : 40] And that is all they are doing and they are not getting bored. I want you to think about that. That has been happening for all time. Since those angels were created and came into existence, that is what they did.

They saw and they beheld God's glory and they called to one another, holy, holy, holy. But that's the thing about God. Every time you behold him, every time we get a glimpse of him, what we are seeing is something new and amazing, just like these angels.

And that new revelation, every time they looked at him, they saw something even more impressive than what they saw before. And so that's why it was a natural response. It pulled it out of them.

And when we behold the fullness of God's glory one day in heaven, it will be a never-ending crescendo of joyful revelation for all eternity. We are not going to be bored and we are never gonna be able to figure God out fully in that as well.

It's gonna be this unending discovery of the glory of God. Think about that. And as creatures created by one who is so transcendent, we live in this paradox.

[7 : 42] Now, here on earth, God is both known through revelation and yet he is impossible to fully know. And nothing gets out this more clearly than what we see actually at Jesus's baptism.

In verse 10, it says, and when he came up out of the water, speaking of Jesus, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the spirit descending on him like a dove and a voice came from

heaven, you are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased.

Now, what we see here is we see God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Now, the Christian church is very comfortable with that. We're very comfortable with God being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We're not only comfortable with it, it's actually at the very heart of our faith. But let's step back into that moment, okay? We live where we live now. We know these things. Let's step back into that moment as a Jew living, seeing this happen.

Because up until then, the God of the Bible was seen as one God, one being. That was it. And this comes from a reading, a very narrow reading of Deuteronomy 6.4, where God says, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[8 : 51] So their understanding is, we worship a God unlike the pagan gods of all the nations around us, of which there are many varieties to choose from. Our God is one God and only one God, and he's the one true living God, and that is it.

He's created everything by him, through him, and for himself. And that's what they knew. That's what they believed. And for the Jew in that day, anybody claiming to also be Yahweh or who would change the nature from God being one God or one person to anything else, that was heresy, and that was anathema.

If somebody did that, it was like, hey, we're gonna have a stoning party. Let's get some stones. It's time for target practice. That's what would happen. They took that very seriously. So at Jesus's baptism, these things that are happening, man, they don't have a grid for this.

The heaven's open. The spirit descends like a dove. The voice of God the Father speaks to the Son, the Trinity. Like, this isn't on anyone's grid of even being possible. But what do we often do when we encounter things we don't fully understand?

Well, we try to make them fit into what we do understand. And for the onlookers at Jesus's baptism, who understand God to be one and only one God, what we see is that's kind of what they understood in the other gospel accounts.

[10 : 08] It's like, you know, some heard thunder. That's when God spoke and said, your beloved son. Some said, oh, that must have been thunder. And then, you know, the very thing of the spirit descending like a dove.

It's like we have to equate these things with something that, okay, that doesn't make sense what I'm seeing. That must have been a dove. Maybe people walked away with like, hey, that was weird when that got baptized. It was like a thunder thing, and this weird dove fluttered down on him.

Like, you know what? What do you think that was all about? But for John the Baptist, he is seeing these things differently. He's seeing these with the eyes of revelation that Jesus is the son of God, the Messiah.

And so God shows up in the desert in a manner that nobody expected or could have imagined. He blows everybody's preconceived notions of what they knew about God. And this isn't bad news.

This is good news because the God you can't easily explain is better than the God you can. And here's why I say this. God as Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, I'm gonna be honest, it is a hard to understand concept.

[11 : 10] There is a lot of mystery wrapped up in it. I wanna say if you're here today and you're exploring the Christian faith, or maybe you're new to the Christian faith and you're hearing this, and you're thinking, man, Jesse, this sounds really crazy.

Sounds a little cuckoo. I don't know if I can get my, at face value, I would say yes. This is crazy. It's hard to understand. There is nothing we can compare this to. But hopefully I can show you why this is profound.

So Trinity theology, one God, three distinct persons, perfect in unity and oneness, and yet somehow distinct, same in substance and nature and character and attribute, yet different in personhood.

I just said a lot of stuff, and you guys are like, I'm trusting you're nodding your head, meaning you're saying, yeah, I'm tracking so far. If you're not, that is totally okay. All right? This thing is just hard to understand.

And in the same breath, we confess these things, that they are both exactly alike and yet unique.

And actually, any effort to do that by allegory with something on earth to try to explain it, it actually ends up in heresy.

[12:11] You know, there's a really funny video, if you wanna see how this works. There's a funny video on YouTube. It's titled St. Patrick's Bad Analogies. It's like maybe eight minutes. Trust me, it's worth it. It'll make you laugh.

But it goes into explaining why, when you try to explain the Trinity, like, oh, it's like an egg, or it's like water that exists in three different, it could be water, or it could be a vapor or gas or liquid.

I'm missing one here. Anyways, ignore me. Ice, thank you, thank you. I failed science. All right, all right. This is not my strength. I need to wheel it back into where I'm good. This is like, okay.

Stepped out of my comfort zone there for a second, and we all suffered.

I'm sorry. But anytime you try to explain something of God in this mystery with something, it just falls short because it doesn't work.

But just because it's hard to explain doesn't mean we shouldn't delve into its mysteries because we actually discover some essential truths about God that only makes sense if God is Trinity and the truths about him are so important.

[13:18] They are so important. And one may, a big one here, and one I kind of want to focus in on is God's claim that he is love. Not just that he has lots of love, right, but that love could not exist apart from God as Trinity.

And if everything that we know, if everything that exists comes from him and is offered by him and he pre-exists it all, then if God is love, it is by necessity, it's Trinity.

Consider this. If God was one person and only one person, who could he love in order to know what love is? Love by its very nature demands a subject and an object, at least one.

You have to be able to love something. But God isn't just two persons. And that would shape love and limit it to just being reciprocal if he was.

I love you, you love me. But because God is Trinity, it adds another dimension to love. The theologian Millard Erickson explains it this way. It is possible for two human persons to have a relationship of love for one another that is much more difficult for three persons to have among themselves.

[14:28] Two persons may simply reciprocate love, not having to share the other person's love with anyone else, but with three persons, there must be a greater quality of selflessness, of genuine agape, which is a word that means unconditional love.

This Trinity founded upon love is a demonstration of the full nature of agape. See what it's saying here?

It's like, man, because God is Trinity, it's not a cheap love. It is a kind of love that is radically selfless. It is a kind of love that says, you know what, I don't have to be the center of this thing.

I can rejoice, the Father can rejoice in what is going on between the Son and the Spirit. The Son can rejoice with what is going on between the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit can rejoice with the love and the joy that is being shared between the Father and the Son.

And you know what, they don't feel jealous, they don't feel slighted, they don't feel left out. That is a beautiful, rich kind of love. And so we can't ditch the Trinity without there being serious negative effect on one of the most crucial attributes necessary for human flourishing, this idea of unconditional love.

[15:43] And here we see the Trinity clearly identified at Jesus' baptism and acting out of the essence of what real divine love looks like. Before Jesus does anything, right?

He shows up on the scene. He's born, he's raised up in obscurity, and then he gets baptized. He has done nothing of note. He has done no type of ministry.

And before he does anything, he's blessed by God the Father. And it pleases the Spirit to descend upon him like a dove to show his abiding presence is upon Jesus and that he is with him.

God's love does that. It expresses itself in giving good things. And if we are to understand ourselves through the nature of the Trinity, and we should, God is community, he created us in his likeness, we by our nature need community.

We are communal people. And so if we understand ourselves better through this is that we were made for community, but we are made for a community that blesses one another.

[16:44] And if you hold, I would hold out to you that this baptism moment is actually, it is actually pointing us back to the creation of Adam and Eve.

In Genesis 1, 27 to 28, it said, God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them. God creates them, Adam and

Eve, right?

He creates Adam out of the dust of the ground. He creates Eve out of the side of Adam. Adam comes up out of the ground, fashioned by God's hands as a new creation.

And what is the first thing God does? He looks at them and he says, you're blessed. I bless you. Water baptism. Water baptism symbolizes rebirth.

It symbolizes new creation. So very similar to that creation account, Jesus comes up out of the water. He's a new creation.

[17 : 44] What is God's first words over him? Blessing. See the connection. Jesus didn't get baptized because he needed sins to be forgiven. Man, he was doing something else.

He was going back and he was redeeming what was lost. You and I, we were made for God's blessing, but we do what Adam and Eve did. It wasn't enough for them to be blessed by God. They sought unauthorized blessing. That's why they went to that tree and they took and they ate of it. Like they saw it as a means to be wiser. They saw it as a means to be on par with God. They believed the lie that you are not enough like God.

You can become like God if you do this. And they tried to take it for themselves. So what they were doing is they were saying, God, sorry, the way that you said we were created in your likeness and image and we were made for blessing and you blessed us and you gave us everything we need. Well, we're not satisfied with that. We're gonna step over here and we're gonna get a different blessing that we can take a hold of. And this is at the heart of all our sins. We leave the Eden of God's blessing seeking unauthorized blessings that never ever measure up and compare to his.

[18 : 49] And we live in that lie. But this is the power and the beauty of Jesus's baptism. We see God literally ripping open the heavens, is what it says, to break in and give an Adam-like benediction.

This is my beloved son. In you, I am well pleased. Jesus, this new and better Adam, coming out of the waters of new creation, he is given God's blessing of love, of relationship, of delight.

That's an amazing thought, right? And we would love to stay in that, but it kind of makes the next thing just very strange. Because right away, right after all that thing, he takes Jesus into the desert. It says in verse 12, the spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness 40 days being tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild animals, and angels were ministering to him.

And this is such a radical pivot from what happened at Jesus's baptism, but that's the point, right? Jesus is driven out into the wilderness, and again, little Adam connection, who's he with?

[19 : 57] Wild animals. Think about that. Adam, the first thing that he did, he was with animals naming them. So Jesus is out in this wilderness all by himself.

It doesn't make sense. Man, God just like, God just did something awesome and amazing, and then, whoop, what's going on? Well, I think that's the point.

I think these stark contrasts, we're supposed to pick up on this tension. Yes, we are made for blessing. God delights in us and speaks blessing over us, but we can't turn that into a doctrine of that's all he does.

The God of the gospel doesn't do what you expect, and we want the God who blesses us. We want the God who accepts us, and we should, because that's what our souls are always crying out for, and we do find it to him.

But, you know, often, we don't want the God who might drive us into the desert. That part, not so much. That sounds a little bit scary, but that is exactly where he takes Jesus. Just like the old Adam who had to face the serpent in the garden, Jesus had to face the serpent in the wilderness.

[21 : 03] He had to face down Satan. Adam and Eve faced off with Satan, and they did it in Eden. They had home court advantage, and they failed the test. And their failure is also our failure. They ate the lie that Satan promised, and it permeated their body and soul with sinful corruption.

And because we are all their sons and daughters, they pass it on to us. We are born that way. Now, you might say, man, that's not fair. How come we have to inherit what Adam and Eve, because Ab and Eve failed?

Well, it does sound unfair until you hear the rest of the story. Jesus, the new Adam, the son of God, went into hostile territory, full of the spirit, and he overcame the tempter.

So where the old Adam failed us, the new Adam proved victorious. Instead of me and you have to do this for ourselves, Jesus did it for us. The God of the gospel did what you couldn't so you could

live in his blessing.

You and I will always repeat the same sin of Adam and Eve. And that, like, permeates in all the ways, in all the ways that that manifests out of in our lives, but, like, the core bit of that is the sinful nature, this bent to strike out on our own, to seize upon unauthorized blessing for ourselves apart from God.

[22 : 21] And because of that ingrained proclivity, it's impossible for us to choose God. It's impossible for us to choose him and his righteousness on our own.

We need help. And so that's why God steps in. And he steps in and he rescues us, even before we ask for it. In verse 10, that passage we read, it talks about the heavens being torn open.

That word in the Greek is schizo, like where you get the word schizophrenic from. And it means to rend, to tear something open. God's love for Jesus was such that he tore open the barrier between heaven and earth to descend on his son and to bless him.

Now, to us, tearing open the heavens sounds really poetic, really beautiful, right? But to a Jew, that was actually not poetic at all.

A Jew in that first century, their view of the world was that God was exalted, holy and high, and he lived up in the heavens, separated from the earth. So you had this layer where God's full holiness and righteousness was up in the heavens.

[23 : 33] And then there was earth, fallen earth, where God's presence would sometimes break in a little bit, right? It wasn't up there with God fully, but still it wasn't as bad as it could be because the next level underneath the earth was the grave, it was Sheol.

And to be there was to be as far away from God as you could possibly be. And it was a place described as utter darkness and chaos. Now, think about this.

So you have heaven where God is, you have earth where man is, and you have the grave where it's the worst place to be. And then God gives Israel this like one little amazing space called the temple. And inside the temple, specifically, the Holy of Holies, which represented the place where God's immediate presence, his heavenly presence would be, uniting heaven and earth in that little place. And God was close to his people there, but it was limited to those little bit of square feet. And nobody could go into that little space because there was a big, thick curtain that was placed as a barrier.

[24 : 41] And one time, one time a year, the high priest, one man could enter into it, but he had to come in after having made atonement for himself so he could stand before a holy God.

And he went in there to make atonement for God's people for the year. And I bring this up, not because I wanna nerd out, because it's important, because the next time we see this word schizo is immediately after Jesus dies on the cross.

Look at this, Mark 15, 38. And the curtain of the temple was torn, schizo. It was torn in two, from top to bottom.

And what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross was profound. God shows us exactly what it does, what he does, in that he tears the curtain of the temple itself.

God removes every barrier between him and us. Just like at Jesus's baptism, he ripped open the heavens to come down and say, man, I'm bringing heaven down right now to bless my son.

[25 : 43] God removes every barrier at the cross. He tears open that curtain to remove and brings heaven into our space, invades our space. Love, God's love, what it does, it does whatever it takes to close that gap.

And that's true for me and you right now. God has torn through. He has torn the veil. Jesus endured the curse of the cross. Why? So we can live under the blessing of the Father who pours out his spirit on us, who now looks at us and says, you are my beloved son.

You are my beloved daughter. In you, I am well pleased. And it's not because you've done anything. That's the position you live in. All the time.

Because of what Jesus has done. This triune God is unfathomable. He is incomprehensible. And so are his ways.

And so is the measure and depth of his grace and his love and his blessing towards you and me. As the band comes up, here's how I want us to respond. If you're here and you are not a Christian, my prayer is that God has shown you who he really is.

[27 : 02] Through the sermon today, through the passage today, and also he has shown you how much he loves you, that he would send his son to die for you.

And I just want you to know this. The heart of God, his natural bent is to bless, not to curse. Unless we stand under sin and refuse to repent, we already stand condemned because of that.

But he is calling us out of that. Man, he wants you to come and to receive the sacrifice that Jesus has made for you so that you can come in and receive this amazing, become a new creation, a son or a daughter, man, and receive this amazing blessing from him.

And all it takes is faith. Man, God is breaking in to get to you right now, if that is you. And all it takes is surrender to him, faith in him that he sent his son to die on the cross for your sins.

We're gonna have a prayer in a moment. We're all gonna pray together, but for you, if that's you, we're gonna have a prayer up on the screen that you can pray to surrender and give your life to Jesus. And you know what? You will be a new creation and receive all the heavenly blessings that God has for you.

[28 : 18] If you are here and you're already a Christian, I wanna say to us in the room today, if this is you, if this is you listening, how is God calling you to respond to this? And what has he stirred up in your heart? Man, maybe it's just like a renewal of thanks of just like, you know what?

I drift into this thing of like, man, I have to earn his blessing. We have to get back to saying like, no, no, no, no. I am blessed because of that. Maybe it's just realizing the beauty of the Trinity and who he is and that you were made for community that blesses.

And you could come and be a better part of that. Maybe that's taking that next step.