

I. Introduction

Good morning! In last week's message, I talked about how we have two Advocates interceding for us, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And, I also emphasized that we should ask God to fill us with His Holy Spirit, so that we might become effective witnesses for Him and for the Good News of Jesus Christ. Today, I would like to encourage all of us to continue to ask, knock, and seek for more of God's Spirit in our lives.

One important part of seeking more of God's presence in our lives is to learn to know God better through study. Today, we will study several things, but what I want to spend the most time on is the Trinity. As we read Acts 1:6-11, let's notice what it reveals about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

II. Scripture Reading Acts 1:6-11, NIV 1984

6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

III. Teaching

The disciples asked (1:6), "**Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?**" This question reveals that they were still looking for an earthly kingdom. Even after all that Jesus had shown and taught them, they still didn't really understand. Like all of the Jews of their time, they were still longing for the soldiers and governors of the Roman Empire to be thrown out of Israel and for the restoration of an earthly Kingdom of Israel, ruled by the Messiah, God's king. But Jesus answered (1:7), "**It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.**" Jesus does not reject the idea of a future restoration of the Kingdom of Israel, but Jesus does tell them that the timing will not be revealed to them.

Before this, in **Matthew 24:36**, Jesus spoke to the disciples about the end times and said, "**No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**" Now, in today's passage, Jesus seems to indicate that if there will be a restoration of Israel, then, it will come with the end times. And so, many conservative Bible scholars believe that the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel will occur during a literal millennial reign of Jesus as King in Jerusalem.

However, the point I want us to notice today is that some things are known only to God the Father. Even Jesus does not know exactly when the end of the age will come. This raises a question. If Jesus is God, then, how is it possible for Jesus to not know? I think the answer is found when we realize that God is capable of restraint. As God the Son, Jesus has access to all knowledge. But as the Son of God, Jesus chooses to restrain Himself, limiting His own knowledge out of deference to the Father. In the Trinity of God, the Father, Son, and Spirit are all equally God and, as God, each has access to all power and knowledge. But in God's wisdom and plan, each member of the Trinity voluntarily takes a particular role.

Isaiah 6 records the time when Isaiah was called as a prophet of God. The moment of decision comes in this fascinating verse, **Isaiah 6:8**, "**Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"** In this verse, Isaiah volunteers to go as the prophet of the Lord. But I feel that we can also hear an echo of another decision here, a time when the

Father asked, “Whom shall I send?” And the Trinity asked, “Who will go for us?” And Jesus answered, “Here I am. Send me!”

If we can read Isaiah 6:8 in this way, then we can see that the Lord made a decision to establish His plan of salvation for mankind, and in that decision, the members of the Trinity accepted different roles. Take a look at what it says in **Psalm 2:7, a Messianic Psalm, “I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.”** This verse seems to speak of a point when the roles of the Father and Son in the salvation plan of God were established.

As we begin to understand the concept of the Trinity, many difficult Bible passages become easier to understand. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all God, equal in power and identical in essence, one God in three persons. But they have each taken on specific roles in God’s plan. Now, let’s look at **Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** Here, Jesus is revealing more details about the plan of God.

In the next stage of God’s plan, a time we call the church age, the Holy Spirit will take on a central role of empowering the church to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. Now, God could have announced the Good News by speaking directly from heaven to all nations, or He could have used angels to take the Gospel to every people within a few minutes. But, in His perfect wisdom, God chose to work through the disciples to spread the Good News, first in Jerusalem, and then beyond - step by step, over a period of many years. We don’t know why God chose this plan, but we can rejoice and give thanks that God has given us the privilege of participating in His work in this way.

Acts 1:9, “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.” Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven and returned to the Father. Since that time, Jesus has been watching over His church from heaven. And, ten days after Jesus’ ascension to heaven, the Holy Spirit came on the disciples with power. We will read about that in Acts 2.

Of course, when Jesus left, the disciples were at a loss. But the Lord provided some help for them. Two men, almost certainly two angels in reality, appeared and explained a bit more. (**Acts 1:10-11**) **“They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”**”

Jesus, the very same Jesus who went into heaven, will return in the same way in which He departed. This means that the Second Coming will be literal, physical, and dramatic. Everyone will know when Jesus comes back. **Matthew 24:30** describes it this way, **“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”**

Until Jesus returns, we live in the church age. The church age is a paradoxical time because it is a period of history in which we know that Jesus has already gained the victory over sin and death, but also a period when we still experience sin and death. The disciples imagined that the coming of the Messiah would mean a clear and sudden break with the past. They thought all of the old things would be done away with at once and the new Kingdom of Israel would immediately be established. But God’s plan was a bit different. The old things continue until the end times, but at the same time new things are being introduced.

In the Alpha Course, Reverend Nicky Gumbel, uses a simple diagram like this to illustrate the idea. The old fallen world of sin, suffering, and death, still continues and will continue until the Second Coming. But since the time of the cross, a new thing has begun and the Kingdom of God is being made manifest through the church. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God is already establishing His Kingdom, in our hearts and in the



fellowship of believers. When we walk by the Spirit and have the fruit of the Spirit and the power of the Spirit in our lives, we already experience many of the blessings of the Kingdom of God. Of course, we will not have the full experience of the Kingdom until Jesus returns, but meanwhile, we can already begin to experience the joy and peace of Christ. And sometimes, we even get to see miracles of various kinds, including supernatural healing. This experience of God's rule is a blessing and encouragement to us, and a witness to the world, because in it God's love is being revealed and demonstrated.

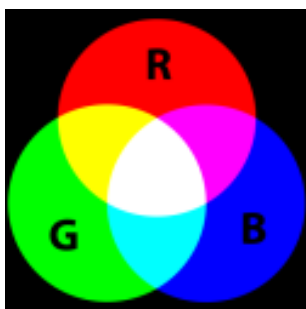
The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all present in today's passage, so it is a good opportunity to talk a little more about the Trinity. Sometimes we even see the whole Trinity in a single verse, like **Matthew 28:19**, "**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**" Here, as the Trinity doctrine requires, we see that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are listed together as equals, revealing that there is One God in Three Persons.

Some people challenge the Trinity doctrine with simplistic questions such as, "How can three equal one?" But that type of question comes from a failure to understand the concept. Three apples are definitely not equal to one apple; that would be nonsense. But one apple can certainly have three flavors, with the skin, the meat, and the seeds all tasting quite differently. Likewise, the, "One," of the Trinity and the, "Three," of the Trinity are not used in reference to the same things, so there is no contradiction in the Trinity doctrine.

When we say God is One, we are speaking of the indivisible divine essence of God and the perfect unity of God. On the other hand, when we say there are Three Persons, each equally God, we are referring to the fact that the Bible reveals that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each have the attributes of individual personality and the attributes of God, and yet there is only One God. The Bible clearly states that there is only One God, and at the same time the Bible reveals God in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

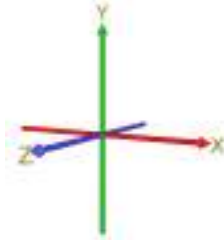
God is a Trinity; and, since man is made in the image of God, it is no surprise that man is also a trinity. **1 Thessalonians 5:23** mentions this saying, "**May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" As human beings, we have a spirit, a soul, and a body. Each of these is the person, but there is still only one person.

Nature also gives us other analogies to help us understand the concept of a trinity. Liquid water, ice, and steam are all distinctly different, but they are also the same thing in essence, H₂O. There is really only one thing, the water molecule, H₂O, but in nature we experience it as three different things, ice, steam, and water.



Another trinity example is light. All of the colors of light that a human eye can discern can be produced from combinations of three primary colors, red, green, and blue. A red light, a green light, and a blue light are all light. Each of them has all the characteristics of light and they are identical in their nature. They are all light; but when the three appear together, we see only one white light.

A simple thought experiment with mathematical dimensions also demonstrates the reasonableness of the trinity concept. If we ignore the dimension of time, then we can say that we live in a three dimensional world of height, width, and depth. We often use an X, Y, and Z diagram to illustrate this. But, what if there was a world with only two dimensions, only X and Y, a world flatter and thinner than a sheet of paper?



I brought along a friend, Mr. Flat, to help us. Mr. Flat lives in a two dimensional world, represented by this piece of paper board. Can you imagine being Mr. Flat? What would things look like from his perspective? Mr. Flat's world has only two dimensions; so he cannot perceive anything above or below his flat world. Even if I place my hand directly in front of him, he cannot see it at all unless I actually touch his world.



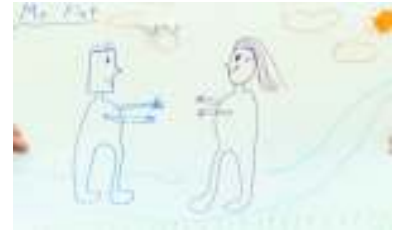
Let me draw a circle in Mr. Flat's world. What does Mr. Flat see? He sees only the edge of the circle; so to him it looks like a line. How about a triangle or a square? They also look like lines. In his two dimensional world, Mr. Flat cannot tell the difference between a circle, a square, or a triangle without walking around it or touching it to feel for corners.

What if I open a hole in Mr. Flat's world and poke my finger through the hole; what does Mr. Flat see? Well, since he cannot perceive anything above or below his two-dimensional world, my finger is just like a circle to him, and he sees only a line. Now, I made Mr. Flat's world and I brought him into being by drawing him. So, just for an example, I will tell him, "Hello, Mr. Flat, I made your world, I am your god." Will he believe me? To him, I look like an ordinary line. Even if he investigates carefully, I will seem only like a circle to him. Maybe, I can do some miracles to convince him. I can appear and disappear. I can change the color of his grass with a marker, or cause the sun to disappear by removing it from his world. But when Mr. Flat looks at me, he will still see only a line; that is the limitation of his two-dimensional world.

What if I poke three fingers into his world? Mr. Flat will see three separate lines, but I can tell him, "To you, I look like three lines, but actually, I am one thing, I am a hand." Now, no matter how many miracles I do to demonstrate my power, Mr. Flat still has to choose whether or not he will believe me when I say the three lines he sees are really all one thing, called a hand.

Mr. Flat has two dimensions and we have three dimensions. But how many dimensions does God have? It is impossible for us to know. God is transcendent, His existence and His world are completely beyond our understanding. But God has demonstrated who He is through many miracles and through many fulfilled prophecies that prove He exists beyond the time and space of this world. And in the Bible, God has revealed that He is One God in Three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The question that remains is, will we believe Him? Regardless of how much evidence God gives us, a step of faith is always required, because God is beyond our understanding.

Let's look at Mr. Flat once more. Now he has a girlfriend, and he has told her about his experiences with the creator hand that made their world. Because of his testimony, she believes, even though she has never seen a miracle herself. After they get married, Mr. and Mrs. Flat have a very close relationship; they are very much in love. But no matter how close they get to each other, I can always have a closer relationship with them than they have with each other. That is because I can see what is in their minds and I can touch them in the center of their heart. They see only the outside, but I see the inside. I can even stay in both their hearts all the time, very easily, because I am transcendent to their world.



God is easily able to see what is in our minds and He can touch our hearts, because He is not limited to our tiny three-dimensional world. We do not know how many dimensions His world has. Maybe, God is transcendent in such a way that He exists in an infinite number of dimensions, or maybe the word dimensions cannot even be used to describe His existence.

IV. Conclusion

There is much that we cannot understand about God, but He speaks to us through His Word and we can choose to believe the things He reveals to us. And one of the key things He has revealed is that He is a Trinity God, One God in Three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The scene of Jesus' baptism is another place in Scripture where all the Persons of the Trinity appear together. Let's close with that scene, as Jesus is baptized, the Holy Spirit comes, and the Father speaks from heaven. **Matthew 3:16-17, "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.""**

V. Prayer