

God's Glorious Son-A glimpse of the Trinity

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- [0 : 00] Dear Heavenly Father, we pray that you would help us as we think about your Son. Please send your Holy Spirit so that we can know you better and know Jesus better.
- We pray for your glory and honour shining in the face of Jesus so that it would be apparent to us by your Spirit now. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I wonder what difference the Trinity makes to us.
- What difference does the Trinity make to our day-to-day thinking about God? What practical difference would it make to us if Jesus were just an exalted man or an angel or a mode or manifestation of God?
- How would our lives and worship be different? I think if we're Christians, we would all want to say that the Trinity is a non-negotiable for us. We know that it's a key marker that sets us apart from heretics and cults and Muslims, and we know that it puts Jesus in a different category.
- But I wonder how deep the doctrine goes in our affections. As I look at the articles that come into me in my job as editor with the Gospel Coalition, I don't get too many on the Trinity.
- [1 : 16] We're worried about the government and how it's moving to restrict our freedoms, or we're worried about how to hold on to young people or how to keep the Gospel on the agenda.
- We're worried about managing the various pressures of life and work. Our concerns, in other words, tend to be practical and straightforwardly evangelical. Maybe Trinitarian theology leaves us cold.
- Maybe it scares us off with its complicated terminology. Maybe we worry that it takes us away from straightforward realities like the Bible and the Gospel.
- But today as we have this brief glimpse of the doctrine of the Trinity from Hebrews 1, I hope we'll see that it's a doctrine that is both biblical and practical. And even more than that, I hope we'll see that it's a doctrine that should cause us to rejoice.
- The context of our passage, of course, is a letter to some Jewish Christians in the first century. We don't know where they were located or very much about their circumstances, but we can see that they were in danger of turning away from Christianity back to Judaism.
- [2 : 25] Perhaps it was increasing persecution. There were certainly hints of that later in the letter. Perhaps it was the comfort and familiarity of their heritage, a temple you could visit in person, sacrifices that you could buy and offer yourself.
- Or perhaps they'd simply lost their first love. They'd stopped meeting together regularly. They'd stopped encouraging each other. But our writer, and we can't be too sure of too much about him either, wants to warn his readers that going back, turning away from Jesus would be a disaster.
- And it will be a disaster because turning away from what they already have would be turning away from the most important things in the universe.

Because in coming to know Jesus, they have come to the end of days, the final revelation of God, because Jesus is God's son. And in coming to know Jesus, they've been given the key to history, God's secret design for creation, because Jesus is God's heir.

And those are our two headings today. Jesus is God's son, and Jesus is God's heir. The first thing our writer wants us to know is that Jesus brings a radically new kind of revelation because of who he is.

[3 : 45] Many times, and in various ways, God relayed information about himself to his people by means of prophets entrusted with his words. He acted in history, and he explained his actions through his agents.

But now he has finally sent someone himself who is himself a revelation because he is a true son. Now, the idea of Jesus being a son might not initially seem too remarkable.

The Old Testament, of course, speaks of other sons of God. Angels, kings, the whole nation of Israel are called the sons of God. It means they have a special relationship to God or some limited similarity to him.

They share, for example, in his rule over the world. Being a son, in this sense, is a kind of office. If we could look at the first diagram, we see God and his sons, the creatures who act as his sons or have official relationship to him.

And Jesus has this kind of sonship too as the Messiah. We see it in the very next verse after our main passage in verse 5 of Hebrews 1. There the writer quotes Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7, and he says, For to which of the angels did God ever say, You are my son, today I have begotten you, or I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

[5 : 06] This is about Jesus being given a sonship, being crowned as God's king, the ultimate ruler over every other ruler in heaven and on earth.

But Hebrews 1 shows us that Jesus is also God's son in another sense. The reason why he's coming into the world is such a big deal is because he's God's real son.

A son who, like every natural son, comes from his father, shares in his father's reality, and is just like his father. Notice how verse 3 describes him as the exact representation of God's being.

The Greek word for representation, or *charaktere*, conveys the idea of an impression left in a clay or wax seal after the seal is pressed into it.

Jesus is just like God like that. And Jesus is the representation of God's being. The word for being here means what God is. Just as a child fully shares in the human nature of his or her parents, so Jesus fully shares in whatever God is.

[6 : 20] Except in this case, the likeness between father and son is perfect. Let's have a look at that next slide, thank you. So whatever God is, we see it again in Jesus.

Jesus isn't just a bit like God. He's God all over again. And part of that means that he has the same power as God to create things. In verse 2, he is the one through whom God made the universe.

In verse 3, we read that he sustains all things by his powerful word. So in Genesis 1, God creates by his word. He says, let there be light, and there was light, and so on.

And here in Hebrews 1, we see that it's Jesus' word that keeps things going. His word, in other words, is just as fundamental to our existence as his father's. Jesus is exactly the same, just as powerful, just as necessary, just as truly our creator.

But wait, you say, if Jesus is like God, does that mean he's a second God? Is he a second God with his own power and ideas? That diagram, of course, might indicate that, a separation between God and the son.

[7 : 32] And that's how it is with humans to some degree, isn't it? A child comes forth from a parent's body at a point in time, but then they're separated. One of them might die and the other will go on living.

Or a man might be just like his father, a real chip off the old block. But the strength that he inherits from his father is in his own body. If they work together, they double their strength.

If only one works, there's less. But with God and his son, it's different. The link is never broken. We see it most clearly in John's gospel, in the way Jesus speaks of his father living in him or speaking and acting through him.

For example, in John 14, verse 10, the words, In Hebrews 1, this sense of continuity or organic oneness comes through at the start of verse 3 where Jesus is described as the radiance of the glory of God.

Now that word radiance can either mean the rays of light coming off a light source or the reflection of a light source. But in both cases, the connection is live and dynamic.

[8 : 45] Reflections and rays can never be separated from the light that is producing them. Neither can Jesus be separated from his father. The son can't be the son without the father and the father can't be the father without his son.

Jesus is also described here as God's glory, the radiance of his glory. First century Jews would have been familiar with the idea that God's presence would be communicated and mediated by his glory shining in the tabernacle or from Mount Sinai.

We saw an example of that in our reading from Exodus 40, didn't we? Well, now we see that Jesus himself is that visible embodiment of God's presence.

To see him is to see God. To look at him is to find out what God is like. And once we understand this, we're ready to see how the doctrine of the Trinity begins to arise out of the Old Testament.

Let's have a look at that next diagram. Thank you. So in the Old Testament, God works through angels, through agents, prophets who speak his words and priests who mediate his holiness and angels and kings or humans in general who rule as his sons and image bearers.

[9 : 57] But alongside that, we also see God working through direct manifestations of himself, for example, by his word or by his wisdom or by the glory of his presence. Neither of these in the Old Testament is the Trinity, of course.

The created agents are real persons, but they're just creatures. And the manifestations might just be God making himself known through visible signs. But with Jesus, all these things come together.

He's God's agent. He's God's prophet and priest and king. But he's also God's living word and wisdom and glory through whom God acts in the world.

He's a distinct person, but he's also inseparably connected to God. There's no difference in power or character because Jesus has the very power and character of God in himself.

Let's have a look at the next diagram. So trying to combine those two things, there is God the Father and God the Son. The Son as his word and glory and wisdom manifest and a person.

[11 : 05] Just in passing, you might be wondering where the Holy Spirit fits in here. I'm not going to be talking too much about the Holy Spirit because the Trinity is a huge topic, but we should say something. And the short answer is that if we go by what we see in the earthly life of Jesus, he's right there in the middle where those arrows are.

There we go. So when Jesus comes into the world, he is conceived, he comes from the Father and is conceived by the Holy Spirit. When it's time for him to begin his public ministry, the Father sends the Spirit to Jesus to anoint him in the form of a dove.

When Jesus goes out into the desert to be tempted, it's the Spirit who sends him out according to Mark. And when he comes back from the temptation in the desert, it's in the power of the Spirit according to Luke.

In short, everything that Jesus is and does on earth comes from the Father by the Spirit. There's a lot more that we could say about that, but the main point here is that Jesus is who he is because he's a true son, the true son of God who shares in his Father's nature in an unbroken unity, which at least in his earthly life means sharing in God's Spirit.

Now, before we go on to the next heading, let me point out this is slightly different from the way we often think about the Trinity today. If you ask a well-taught evangelical what the Trinity is, he or she might tell you that it means that God is one being and three persons, and that, of course, is a true answer.

[12 : 37] But it will also be a better answer if we include the fact that Jesus comes from God. Then we'll be able to see how God is one and three, and we'll be able to explain the Trinity a bit more easily because we'll be able to use the same explanations that the Bible uses.

For example, we might say, well, Jesus is like the prophets and priests and kings of the Old Testament who share God's words and holiness and rule, except Jesus shares everything God is and has been doing, even creating and sustaining the world from all eternity.

Or we might say, well, Jesus is like the radiance that comes from the sun. You can't have the sun without the light that streams from it, and you can't have that radiance without the sun from which it comes. The two all ways go together.

Well, Jesus is God's radiance, except he's also a real person. Or we might say, Jesus is like a son who is exactly like his father and shares in everything his father has and does, and God loves his son and is proud of him and wants everyone to know him.

Notice these are all analogies, by the way. Sometimes these days people say that we shouldn't use analogies for the Trinity, by which they mean we shouldn't say that God is like a clover leaf or water ice and steam or an egg or something like that.

[13 : 55] That's a good objection. Those analogies aren't very good. But the truth is we can't get away from analogies. The only way we can know God at all is by analogy because he's so different from us.

And the Bible is full of analogies. The Bible gives us analogies to help us understand God. So a more helpful thing to say would be that we should use the Bible's analogies and notice how the Bible qualifies those analogies and holds them together so that they work together.

None of them can tell us the whole truth about God and his son and all of them will mislead us if we take them by themselves. But together they can help us understand true things about the Trinity.

So getting back to Hebrews 1, the primary analogy is sonship but the other analogies help us to understand what that means. So Jesus is God's son but he's much more like his father than any earthly child like their parents.

He's like an impression left by a seal. Perfect likeness. Or Jesus is God's son but he's much more connected to his father than any human son or daughter. He's like radiance coming off the sun.

[15 : 05] And the upshot of all this is that Jesus is the only one who can show us God. Christianity is Christocentric. That is, it focuses on Jesus not because he's more important than God the Father or the Holy Spirit or because he's nicer and more approachable as some people think but because he's the only one only way we can really know God the Father and experience the Holy Spirit.

There's also another reason why we focus on Jesus here in Hebrews 1 and that is our second heading. Jesus is God's heir. Why did God create the world?

That's the kind of question that children ask, isn't it? As you get older you learn not to ask those kind of questions because nobody will give you a good answer. But I remember when I was a kid asking my dad and his answer was that God created the world to have someone to love.

My dad had many good things to say about God and the Gospel but that was a bit wrong, wasn't it? The glorious truth of the Trinity is that God has always had love. The Father and the Son have been loving each other through all eternity in the unity of the Holy Spirit even before the creation of the world as Jesus says in John 17 24.

So what's the right response? Well the Bible never gives us a direct answer to that question but Isaiah 43 7 talks about God creating and calling people for his own glory and other passages throughout the Bible seem to agree with that.

[16 : 38] everything God does is a display of who he is. Heaven and earth are full of your glory as the seraphim say in Isaiah chapter 6.

But in the New Testament we also see that God has a plan within that plan or a purpose within that purpose to bring glory to his Son. A plan for example to do his greatest works through his Son in such a way that his Son will be honoured.

We see a great example of that in John 5 verses 20-23 where we read that the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does and makes him the giver of life and the judge of all the world and he says it's so that people will marvel at him and so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father.

In Hebrews 1 we see that same plan to glorify God's Son described in terms of an inheritance. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he also made the universe.

Now the idea of Jesus having an inheritance again might seem strange. We've already seen that he's God's Son that he's co-creator and sustainer. How can he inherit anything?

[17 : 55] How does he not have everything already? I think the key here is to understand that God's Son develops a new relationship to the world in his life as a man.

The human existence of Jesus has its own story. C.S. Lewis helpfully compares it to an author writing him or herself into the story they're telling. Well in the story that God is writing his Son his Son appears in the world as a baby and grows in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man as Luke 2.52 says he endures trials and temptations and fulfils prophecy and dies for sins and then he's raised to life as the King and Saviour of the world.

This is the story of God's Son in his life as a man. And of course his story is the key to the world's story. The great story of the world as Jesus dies on the cross for sins and comes back to life he changes everything.

He brings sinners back to God and gives the universe a new hope and a new future. He vindicates all God's purposes. He neutralises Satan by satisfying the demands of the law.

He shows that he's the one who is alone worthy to rule God's creation. So as the second half of verse 3 says after he had provided purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven so he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

[19 : 31] So both things are true. God's Son is eternally and unchangeably great and sovereign sustaining all things by his powerful word but he also became superior to the angels in his human life by providing purification for sins he changed history and claimed his destiny.

Hebrews 1 tells us that this was God's plan for the world and for his Son from the very beginning. Verse 2 he appointed him heir of all things. And please note that this fits with what we see in other parts of the New Testament too.

In Ephesians 1 verses 9 and 10 for example Paul speaks about the mystery of God's will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

In Colossians 1 16 we read that all things were made through Christ and for Christ. Three verses earlier in that same chapter Paul tells us that God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

I think this puts a different light on things doesn't it? We are used to thinking that Jesus came into the world as an emergency measure to save us from our sins and that is absolutely true it's a wonderful truth.

[20 : 54] Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance says Paul to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1.15 Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners but Hebrews 1 and Ephesians 1 and Colossians 1 tell us that as Jesus came to die on the cross he was also fulfilling a deeper plan.

God's plan for him to become the saviour of the universe and to be made the centre of everything and that tells us something amazing it says that when we become Christians we aren't just forgiven and given new hope and a new future we are also part of the gift that God is giving his son we are part of Jesus' inheritance we get to share in the love of the father for the son in Hebrews this makes everything more serious and more wonderful it makes things more serious because rejecting the gospel of God's son is a far greater dishonour than turning away from the law of Moses how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation he says in Hebrews 2 verse 3 or Hebrews 10 29 how much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the son of God if we turn away from Jesus we are saying no to the very reason for our existence

God made us to belong to Jesus his son and we're saying no we don't want to be a part of it at the same time we're dishonouring God himself God is a proud father and we're spitting in the face of the son he loves who is the exact representation of his being how can that end in anything but disaster but Hebrews has good news as well as warnings as we go on to Hebrews 2 we discover that Jesus his inheritance belongs to us too he doesn't just redeem us from our sins he brings us to glory and calls us his brothers and sisters in later chapters we hear more about how Jesus takes away our sins and brings us closer to God than any human priest or any built temple on earth ever could by the end of the letter we've gone from warnings to celebration Hebrews 12 our writer tells us that in coming to know Jesus we have come to Mount Zion to the city of the living

God to the heavenly Jerusalem you have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly to the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven you have come to God the judge of all to the spirits of the righteous made perfect to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel so in the end the trinity is a joyful doctrine it tells us that love is at the centre of everything and that we exist because God the father loved his son and wanted to give him an inheritance he tells us when we put our trust in Jesus we don't just find out what God is like we don't just get our sins forgiven both of those things are fundamentally and wonderfully true we also become part of a great celebration we join the father as he points to his son and we join Jesus as he honors the father who sent him we experience the power of the spirit as we see the salvation that we have in knowing

Jesus and I think we will never get to the end of this throughout all eternity we'll be meditating on this and seeing new aspects to it and depths to it as we go on we'll climb higher and higher and see ridge after ridge like the people of Narnia going further in and higher up in the meantime let me finish with a quote from Charles Spurgeon allow me most earnestly to impress upon you the absolute necessity of being sound on the doctrine of the Trinity if we know the Father and know the Son and know the Holy Ghost all things will appear clear this is the golden key to the secrets of nature this is the silken clue to the labyrinths of mystery and he who understands this will soon understand as much as mortals ever can know Lord God we thank you for sending your beloved son into the world thank you for the way your glory and goodness and kindness shone out from him thank you that he made atonement for our sins with his blood and that he now rules at your right hand thank you that because of the way you saved us

[25 : 28] Jesus is our brother and you are our father please make our minds and hearts respond to these wonders fill us with joy so that we can overflow with praise and serve you with willing hearts please use us to glorify your son and yourself by the power of your spirit amen go to spread for the IIs to safety maybe at sword die or you may run