

Written Copy: Who Do You Think God Is? John 8:53-59

Holy Trinity Sunday

Sunday June 16th, 2019

Text: John 8:53-59

⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?" ⁵⁴ Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' ⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

⁵³ Are you greater than Abraham, our father, who died off? As well as the prophets who died off? Who are you making yourself (to be)? ⁵⁴ Jesus answered, "If I Myself might glorify myself, then my glory is being nothing. My Father is the One who continues to glorify me, the One whom you yourselves are saying 'He is our God.' ⁵⁵ And you have not come to know/learned about Him, however I myself still know and understand Him. If I should say that I do not still know and understand Him I will be a liar, just like you. But I have known Him and understood Him, and I am keeping/maintaining His word. . . ⁵⁶ Abraham your father was full of joy in that he might see the day, the one that is mine, and He saw it, and he was made to rejoice." ⁵⁷ Therefore the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet 50 years old, and you have looked upon Abraham?" ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I am saying to you, before Abraham had come into being, I myself am." ⁵⁹ Then they lifted up stones in order that they might throw them at Him. Jesus was concealed and went out of the temple.

Exegetical Statement

The crowd who have been on the fence regarding Jesus and His claims move join the Jews who have been seeking to kill Him when He tells them that in unbelief of what He has told them they are following their father, the devil. In response they claim that it is Jesus who is in league with Satan since He is obviously demon possessed. He responds that in fact He says and does what honors God the Father because He alone truly knows and understands the Father. They on the other hand while claiming to know God really do not, and they do not honor Him and cannot since they act according to their father-Satan. The crowds claim that Abraham is their father is true only in a biological sense, since being Abraham's spiritual children would mean they share His faith in God's promises. Abraham's faith, of which he saw partial fulfillment in the birth of Isaac and in the Angel of the Lord preventing Isaac's sacrifice all point to what Jesus has come to do. But they, who do not have faith in Jesus as the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption from the beginning are lost and will die in their sins unless they repent and believe His Words and His actions-His death and resurrection. The Jews counter Jesus' claim that faith in His promises will mean salvation from death by citing that Abraham and the prophets, who they see as far greater than Jesus, yet they all died. So how can Jesus claim that His promises defeat death? Does He mean to say He is greater than them? And how is it that He can claim Abraham looked forward to this day and Jesus ministry when there is no way Abraham could've known anything about Jesus. Abraham lived over 2,000 years ago and Jesus hasn't even been around 50 years. Jesus then not only explains how but testifies to His divinity by saying 'before Abraham ever existed, I am': existing long before into eternity past and continue to exist now because Jesus is really the great I AM-Yahweh, the God they claim to worship. They understood this claim as seen by their attempt to stone Him. But Jesus was divinely hidden from them because it was not yet the time for Jesus to be sacrificed.

Focus Statement:

In Scripture God has revealed to us that He is Triune. But He has most clearly revealed who He is in relation to us in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son our Savior Jesus Christ. He is the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham and testifies to us in word and actions to the existence of the Trinity-One God in 3 persons.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

If we do not confess God as being Triune as He has revealed Himself to be, we are not His children. God is outside of creation and beyond our ability to understand. Anytime we apply the rules and ideas of human logic we fall short of true understanding of God and can fall into heresy, just as the Jews of Jesus day believed themselves to be God's children but were not as they failed to believe God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ

What the hearer should do as a result:

Understand the glory of our God who, while He has revealed Himself to be Triune is beyond our understanding. But in Jesus Christ, as given to us in the Gospel through the Holy Spirit working faith in our hearts we can hold fast to and believe in our Triune God. We rest in the comfort that our God is indeed greater than our understanding

Subject Sentence: The Triune God revealed in Christ our Redeemer

Two weeks ago Elder Ervin Glann and I attended a seminar put on by Sharps Funeral Home concerning how to best prepare yourself and your family for your passing. There we struck up a conversation with the couple sitting next to us. They had heard someone else say that I was a pastor and they asked which church it was, so we told them. Then I asked them if they attended a local church to which they replied they were longtime members of the local chapter of “The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints”, or as many of you might know them better-the Mormons. I began to ask them how they found out about the church and what had brought them there. The wife said she was a former member of a Baptist Church. She said that they never explained the Doctrine of the Trinity sufficiently to her as the Mormon Church had. When I asked her about what she believed about the Trinity she said they are three separate persons united in purpose. When I asked her about the Old Testament statement from **Deuteronomy 6:4** "**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one**" she responded, “Yes they are One God in purpose. That explanation of the Trinity sat better with her than either the Baptist explanation or frankly the Lutheran Church’s confession of the Trinity. The problem is that explanation is not what God has revealed to us in His word. The Mormons actually go on to have other more heretical beliefs regarding God: that they are actually more than three separate persons but actually three separate Gods. And the Godhead is actually more like a divine counsel as there are more gods than just these three, or so said Joseph Smith in his revelation of divine truth found on his mysterious plates which only he and he alone have laid eyes on.

The thing is this couple were fairly intelligent and rational people. As inquisitive human beings, they desired to inquire into that which God had not revealed to us. And they struggled to accept what He had revealed because our God is supernatural; He exists outside of creation and we who only know this world of time and space cannot grasp the God who created this universe but exists apart from it. But there is much He has revealed about Himself to us in Scripture. But how well do we know this revelation? If Mormon missionaries were to visit you, they would start with their belief that ***“Jesus is the Son of God, the only perfect man to have walked the earth. He led a divine mission to save the souls of mankind through his atoning sacrifice. Only through him and his grace can man find eternal salvation.”*** Now that sounds pretty correct to our ears. But how well

could we judge the other things they believe about God? What do we confess and believe when we say our God is Triune, that He is Three in One?

First of all, where does the title “Triune” come from? Is it in Scripture? No, the Bible never mentions the title “Triune” or specifically calls God the “Trinity”. But the Bible describes God as existing in three persons who all share the same essence—the same divinity that belongs to the One True God. **Genesis 1:1-2** ¹ **In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.** ² **The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.** Here we have God the Father and God the Holy Spirit both present and involved in the work of Creation. But not just these two. **John 1:1-3** ¹ **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** ² **He was in the beginning with God.** ³ **All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.** All that was created was done through the Word, who is the most complete and fullest expression of who God is to mankind, the Word who became flesh, the Son of God who became Jesus Christ. All three present and united in the work of Creation.

But could it be then that the Mormons have it right, that they actually are three separate gods united in purpose? Jesus Himself confessed the Old Testament Scripture about God saying in **Mark 12:29** **“The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”** Yet Scripture over and over again witnesses to the plurality of this One God. **Genesis 1:26a** **“Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.** God in the **singular** saying **let us** make man In Our image and likeness. The Apostle Paul gives this description of the One God existing in three persons in **Ephesians 4:4-6** ⁴ **There is one body and one Spirit---just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call---**⁵ **one Lord, one faith, one baptism,**⁶ **one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.** Note he describes the unity we have as believers in the One True God as being in One (Holy) Spirit, one hope that finds it’s center in One Lord (Jesus Christ), one faith in this One God, one baptism in the name of this One God, with One God and Father. One God manifested in three divine persons who all share the divine essence. And finally Jesus, as He was giving His Apostles their marching orders just prior to His ascension says in **Mathew 28:19** **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,**

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” Notice He doesn’t say to baptize them into the names of three individual gods but into the **name-singular** of the One Triune God. Three persons who share the essence of the One True God in a manner that we cannot totally comprehend.

But what can we say and confess about their relationship to each other within the Godhead? We might envision the board of directors of a large corporation where you have a President and two vice presidents, both of which are given power to run the company but must answer to the president who rules over all. This is not the concept of the Trinity. God the Father is not 1/3 God but fully God in His own right. Just as God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are not each 1/3 God but each fully God. We can see this throughout the Old Testament where God the Father is worshiped. But in **John 9:35-38** ³⁵ **Jesus heard that they (the Pharisees) had cast him out (of the temple), and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"** ³⁶ **He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"** ³⁷ **Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you."** ³⁸ **He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.** Here and throughout the Gospel accounts we see Jesus welcoming the worship that should only be for God Himself. That is because by Himself He is truly God. In **Acts 5:3-4** ³ **But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."** Now one doesn’t lie to a thing or a force. One lies to a person. And the person that Ananias lied to was to God Himself. God the Holy Spirit, by Himself fully God.

The Athanasian Creed seeks to distinguish the three persons of the One Godhead in this way: God the Father-uncreated, eternal, fully God. He begets the Son, He sends the Spirit. God the Son: Uncreated, eternal, fully God. Eternally begotten of the Father into eternity past. He sends the Spirit. God the Holy Spirit: uncreated, eternal, fully God. Neither begets or is begotten. Eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son. We also distinguish them in their relationship to us, the roles we assign to them in regard to their work on our behalf. We assign to God the Father the role of Creator: **Deuteronomy 32:6 Do you thus repay**

the LORD, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?" We assign the role of Redeemer to God the Son: **1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.** And to the Holy Spirit as the role of the one who sanctifies us and makes us holy, working to keep us in the faith Acts 2:38-39 **"³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself"** But in all this we still have three persons who share the same essence, and are united in such a way that where one is working the others are at work too. All three involved in Creation, redemption, and keeping us in our faith.

While God was truthful in His revelation to us about who He is, He realized that because He is beyond our comprehending that we would struggle to understand Him or even draw close to Him. Therefore He sent to His Wisdom in the flesh, God the Son who came down and became man. In Him we have the most important thing we need to know about our Trinitarian God-that He is a God of love. He came to the Jews who time again refused to believe in the witness of His authoritative teaching and His miracles that only God could do. So He spoke to them regarding Abraham, the most influential man ever to live by their standards. Abraham, the one from whom they all traced their ancestry and from whom they received God's blessing and entrance into His kingdom. Jesus told them (**John 8:56-59** **"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad"** ⁵⁷ **So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?"** ⁵⁸ **Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.** ⁵⁹ **So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.** They understood that Jesus was calling Himself the Great I AM, the Eternal God. That was the reason why they wanted to kill Him. But is it possible that Abraham **"rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad"**?

Abraham had been told by God in **Genesis 22:17-18** **¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the**

seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice. Abraham believed this promise of God even though He was old and had yet no children. But when Isaac was born he saw the a partial fulfillment of the promise God had made to him which included that through His offspring all the world would be blessed. And who was it that had come to Him and made that promise? **Genesis 18:1-2 ¹ And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth.**" God had come and appeared to Abraham in human form to give Him this promise. Now, which member of the Trinity do we know that comes in human form? The Son of God, before His incarnation came and spoke with Abraham, who saw Him and recognized Him as God.

Abraham not only saw Jesus before His incarnation, He had illustrated to him what Jesus day would bring, the reason that He had come and was standing before this group of Jews in our Gospel Lesson. In **Genesis 22:9-11 ⁹ When they (Abraham and Isaac) came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." ¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.** Who was this Angel of the Lord who stopped the hand of Abraham before he could plunge the knife in? The one who says "**now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me**", God, the one who had told you to sacrifice Him and then stopped your hand. The One who provided instead a ram which Abraham sacrificed on the altar instead of Isaac. The Angel of the LORD, who is God, who would come to earth some 2,000 years later and take the place of that ram on the altar of sacrifice that was the cross of Calvary. The Son of God who is Jesus Christ who came to be your sacrifice and my sacrifice for sin. The one who was sent by the Father to take our

place and take our punishment so that the Father could claim us as His beloved sons and daughters. The Son of God who promised to send the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who is God and has the power of God to change your heart and your mind from unbelief to belief. The Spirit who works in your life every day to turn you away from your sinful desires and actions, move you to repent of them, and then cling to the work of forgiveness that Jesus accomplished for you. All done by the Triune God as His gift of grace, a mystery that is as deep as the Trinity itself.

God has revealed Himself to be Triune. He has revealed Himself to be the One and Only God who is bigger than we can understand. Yet in this there is comfort. The God who is greater than our logic and understanding is big enough to create not only this world which we live in , yet don't completely understand, as well as a greater world to come: the New Heaven and the New Earth. We don't have to understand everything about Him. But by the same faith granted to Abraham we believe He is three persons united in One essence as the One True God. Who loves us, and grants to us salvation through His means of Word and Sacrament. May you hold fast to this Christian confession of faith by the power granted the Triune God at work for you. Amen