

The Holy Trinity Part 2: John 1:1-3 - Shared Life

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[0 : 00] Well, a couple of weeks ago we began a study on the Trinity, which of course is one of the most profound and glorious topics to look at, thinking about God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And when you come to the Trinity at one level you are seeing the beyondness of God in the sense that God is stretching our minds. We look at God and we can't put him in a box, we can't define him in one sentence. He is beyond what we can say, beyond what we can understand. We are stretching our minds to its limits. And so we see the beyondness of God, but at the same time the doctrine of the Trinity reveals the nearness of God as God is revealing himself to us and he is sharing himself with us. So the God who is beyond us is the God who is right here with us and who is closer than we can ever describe.

Last time our title was Shared Nature and we were looking at the nature of God and we highlighted the fact that God has one nature or one substance. That means that God is indivisible, cannot be separated and it means that God is unique, nothing else has God's nature.

We have human nature, animals have animal nature, this wooden lectern has the nature of wood. God and God alone has God's nature, God's substance. And so it is a unique nature.

But what does that unique single God nature look like? Well the Bible reveals to us that God's, Godness if you like, God's nature is made up of three persons. One substance, one nature, but three persons. God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit. So this single unique God nature is shared between these three. And that is why God is three in one.

One substance, three persons, God shares this triune nature. This week our title is Shared Life.

And our focus is on the words that we read at the beginning of John chapter one.

[2 : 47] In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God, all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of men. Now these words as I mentioned I think in the prayer are among the most remarkable in scripture and there is so much we could look at. Tonight I want us just to take these words section by section and we'll try and see a little of what these verses are teaching us about the trinity.

And when we're looking at the trinity we are I suppose we are wandering into depths. We are heading towards some deep rich teaching. But I know that you can handle it and we'll roll up our sleeves and see what we can learn. So let's just go through this bit by bit together tonight and see what it says. John begins his gospel with three words in the beginning.

Now of course those three words should remind you of another book in the Bible that begins with the very same three words. Genesis chapter one. And I think John is deliberately echoing how the Bible itself opens because Genesis one one says in the beginning God and then it goes on to describe creation. And these three words are the kind of words that are easy to whiz through aren't they? In the beginning what's the word and we can instantly be drawn in our attention to that phrase the word and everything that follows on after it. But we have to remember that no phrase in the Bible is wasted. And these three words they're not just a simple convenient introduction. They're actually teaching us and pointing us to something very important. These three words are pointing us tonight to the very foundation of reality and life. Because let's ask a big question. What is going on? Now when I ask that question

I don't mean what's going on here tonight in terms of our service or what's going on in terms of your past week. But what is going on in terms of the whole of existence? Stand back and think about everything. We are here in a physical reality called the universe.

We are in the midst of a conscious experience called life. And everything is tied up within an ongoing ever moving process called time. The big question is what is going on? Where did all this come from? What is the explanation of it? The universe, life, time, all of these things. And those

three words in the beginning are pointing us to think about these big, big things. We are being confronted by the big questions of existence. And Genesis 1 and John chapter 1 are teaching us that the origin of this reality that we find ourselves in, the origin of that is God. God is the foundation of existence. He is the starting point for everything. He and He alone is the source of life. Now not everybody believes that and you know that as well as I do. But this is what we believe in our church. And we believe it A because the Bible teaches it and B because it is the only explanation of life that makes sense. So that's the first thing we're learning tonight. Excuse me.

[6 : 59] God is the source of life. Now the reason that God is the source of life is because He and He alone has life in and of Himself. And that's the point I really want us to emphasize. God has life in and of Himself. Now we as human beings and every other collection of atoms that exists in this universe, we have our life and our existence as a result of causes that have gone before us. We can't say in the beginning there was light because you have to ask where did the light come from? You can't even say in the beginning there was an enormous bang because even if there was one, where did that come from? And so that's why it's very hard for us as human beings to push ourselves back to an absolute beginning because everything that we observe has existence in it before. Take this piece of paper for example, where did that come from? Well, the paper came from a factory which makes paper out of wood. Where did the wood come from? The wood came from a forest or plantation. Where did the forest come from? It came from a seed. Where did that come from?

These plantations and so on and so on and so on and so on. You can take something else. My tie. Where did my tie come from? Well, sadly I don't think it's made of silk. What is actually? It is made of silk. Silk comes from whatever silk comes from. I was hoping it would be a polyester tie because I know more about where plastic comes from. Plastic of course comes from crude oil which comes from under the ground, etc, etc, etc. You can pick anything and you can ask the same questions. But God is different. God has life in himself. That's what John tells us in verse 4, in him was life. And that's part of the reason why John uses this term the word to describe Jesus as a title for Jesus. He says in the beginning was the word. And that word, word, if you know what I mean, this word, the word is the Greek word logos which we actually studied about two and a half years ago. This was the term that the Greeks used to describe if you like the source of existence and the principle that sustains the world. So if you asked the Greeks where did life come from, they would say from the logos. The logos to the Greeks was the source of existence.

It was the explanation of reality. And John is telling us that that source, that logos is Jesus Christ. Now in our study of the Trinity we will expand that to look at the specific distinctions of Father, Son and Spirit and we'll come to that shortly. The key point that is we're being pointed towards here is that the starting point for all existence is God. God has life in himself. He is the source of life in the beginning God. Now some people might object to that and say well hang on, who made God? That's a question that people ask and I think Richard Dawkins' famous book *The God Delusion* basically that's the main point he tries to make. Well who made God? But that question who made God? It's in reality it makes no sense. It's a bit like asking what number comes after infinity. In talk of infinity what number comes after infinity? You might say infinity plus one but that's impossible. It's a nonsense. To say who made God is really to express an impossibility because we do not believe in a created God. We believe in the God who has life in himself. Now some people might object and say well that's impossible. It's impossible for God to have no beginning but the truth is the opposite. It's impossible for God to have a beginning because if he had a beginning, if he was a created God he wouldn't be God at all. God is above time.

God is above causes. God is above beginnings. That's what we mean when we say that he is infinite and eternal. Now I know that that is pushing our minds to its limits but that is the God that the Bible presents. Not a God with a beginning. A God who has life in and of himself. And that to me is why God is the only explanation of life that makes sense.

[12 : 16] We believe that existence has come from the one who has life in himself therefore he is logically able to bring life into existence. And so even though people might oppose us they can't accuse us of being irrational because we're not going back to a never ending chain of causes. We are going back to the God who is the rational logical explanation for everything that has come into being since. And so God has life in himself and God is the ground of reality and the reason why we are here. But that pushes you and me to ask one of life's biggest questions. What are we doing with ourselves? God has placed us here. God has given us life. What are we doing with our lives? Are

we listening to the God who made us? And as I'm sure you know I've mentioned this before I quite like listening to Reverend Eric Alexander. He is a retired Church of Scotland minister who served for many years at Ayrshire and then in Glasgow. And I heard him speaking about this and he gave an excellent illustration. He said, all through our lives we ask the question, what's this for? You come along and you pick up something like this and you say what's that for? Or maybe you find a tool or maybe you find a utensil or something like that and you say what's that for? And we look for explanations. But he said, do we stand in the mirror and look at ourselves and say and ask ourselves, what am I for? Why am I here? What am I doing with my life? This is where these big questions are pointing us. And so God has life in and of himself. And this is emphasising an important aspect of theology. That is the independence of God. Now sometimes that's known as the Asiati of God. And it's emphasising the fact that God is self-existent. Asiati is from the Latin which means of oneself. And so it's a key theological principle. God is of himself. He is independent. He is uncaused. He has no beginning. He has no end. And he is above all other realities. And because he has life in and of himself, it means that God does not need anything. God does not need anything.

He is not lacking in anything. He is not dependent on anything. He is not constrained by anything outside of himself. God is in a category of his own. He has full and complete life in himself. He is independent. That's an important theological principle and truth to grasp. And it's described for us very, very well in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Never ever be scared of the Westminster Confession of Faith. It is a brilliant document. As I always say, if you don't have it, you can get it on your phone or if you want a copy, speak to me. It's not very long. It's easy to read and it's got such wonderful teaching for us.

This is Chapter 2 of the Westminster Confession of Faith. It's about God. It says of God and the Holy Trinity. This is paragraph 2. We'll see what it says. God has all life, glory, goodness, blessedness in and of himself. That's what we're trying to say tonight. And is alone in and unto himself all sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, not deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto and upon them. So notice that saying it's not saying that God gets stuff from us. It's saying that God gives to us. He alone is the fountain of all being, of whom and through whom and to whom are all things. So he's the fountain of all being. He's the starting point and hath most sovereign dominion over them to do by them, for them or upon them whatsoever pleases himself. So God is the fountain of reality. He is, has dominion in his sight.

All things are open and manifest. So he can see everything, knows everything. His knowledge is infinite, infallible and independent upon the creature. So as nothing is to him contingent, that means like dependent. So he doesn't depend on anything or uncertain. He is most holy in all his councils, in all his works and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men and every other creature whatsoever worship, service or obedience. He is pleased to require of them. Now that's a magnificent paragraph summarizing the fact that God is independent. He has life in and of himself. And notice how beautifully logical the Bible is about all of this because can you remember what God's name means? The Bible reveals to us a very specific name previously translated Jehovah now tends to be rendered Yahweh. In our Bibles it will say the Lord in block capitals. That's God's specific name. Can you remember what it means? It means I am who I am. Exodus 3, 13 to 14 as you can see. And that little phrase I am is a declaration of the independence of God. God has life in himself. He is who he is and everything else follows on from this truth. So that's our first point tonight.

God has life in and of himself. What does John say next? In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. So immediately John is pointed to us that God is the foundation of reality. The life of God is independent from everything else but within God his life is a shared life between Father, Son and Spirit. And that's what these words are pointing to with that magnificent language. The word was with God and the word was God. And in many ways in that sentence two of the key words, other words was and with. The word Jesus Christ was with God in the beginning. Now literally the Greek word is towards and it's a picture of togetherness, a picture of face to face-ness, a picture of intimacy between these two. And verse 14 tells us that that relationship is the relationship between a Father and a Son. The word became flesh and dirt among us. We've seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. So here they are, the word and the Father, the Father and the

[20 : 33] Son, they are with each other, towards each other, face to face. But it's not just that the word was with God, John also says that the word was God. And this takes us back to what we were seeing at the beginning, that these persons, they cannot be divided. Both are together, both are one, both are God. And so John's focus is on the Father and the Son in this amazing intimacy and closeness. And if we read the rest of this of John's Gospel, in the Spiriti chapter 14 and 16, we see that that also includes the Holy Spirit as well.

The key point is that the self-existent life in God is a shared life between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now, here's a question. How does that work? How is the life in the one God shared between Father, Son and Spirit? Well, it's very, very easy to make a mistake here. And many people in the history of the Christian church have made a mistake here because it is easy to think that life in God comes from the Father and then goes to the Son and then goes to the Holy Spirit. I've drawn a diagram to kind of give you the idea.

So you've got God the Father as kind of the main God and then God the Son comes from Him and then God the Holy Spirit comes from Him. And that would be a sort of hierarchy, wouldn't it? You've got God the Father first and prominent and the Son is a bit less and the Holy Spirit is a wee bit less. Lots of people think of God in that way. As I said, that's creating like a hierarchy. Now, there's a very, very fancy term that's used to describe that. It's called ontological subordination. Now, don't worry if you don't know what that means. It's actually not too bad. Ontological just means in terms of existence, in terms of being, subordination just means like getting less and less. And so that's the view that there's kind of this hierarchy, this subordination in terms of the being, the ontology of God, Father first, Son then comes after, Holy Spirit then comes after. Lots of people think like that. Lots of people have used that thinking to reject the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses would say that the Son is a creature. And so they reject the idea of the Trinity. But this kind of ontological subordination, thinking of God as Father first then Son, then Holy Spirit, it's not allowed. It's not true. It's not accurate. Because the vital point we have to remember is that there is equality in the

Trinity. Absolute equality. God the Father is God in and of himself. God the Son is God in and of himself. God the Spirit is God in and of himself. And that makes perfect sense because as we said last time, God's nature, God's Godness is shared between these three.

Therefore they can't be separated and they can't be put into a hierarchy. They belong to all three. So we must not think of God the Son being created by God the Father because that would imply that there was a time when God's Son wasn't there. And that's not true.

[24 : 17] God the Son has just told us that he's been there from the beginning. So that's not how it works. But how does it work? Well, there is a shared element within God. And by that I mean there is something that is true of the Father that's not true of the Son. There's something that's true of the Son that's not true of the Spirit and so on. And put simply we can basically say only the Father is the Father. Only the Son is the Son. And only the Spirit is the Spirit. And there's a diagram that you may have seen. I didn't make up this diagram. This diagram has been in the church for centuries. But this is a better way of understanding it. You've got the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And if you go into the middle, each one of them is God. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is

God. But each person is not the other person. So the Father is not the Son. And he's not the Holy Spirit. The Son is not the Father and not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is neither Father nor Son. It's a very, very helpful diagram because it's emphasizing what God is as one substance and what each person is in their distinctiveness. Only the Father is Father. Only the Son is Son. And only the Spirit is Spirit. And so although God has life in himself, that life is shared with himself in specific ways. And here we come to the next paragraph in the Westminster Confession of Faith. This is maybe a bit of a trickier one, but we'll see how we get on. So this is paragraph three in chapter two. In the unity of the Godhead, there be three persons of one substance, power and eternity. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Now we're happy with that. That's what we've been saying. That's straightforward enough. But now it says, The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father. The Holy Spirit eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son. So basically that is saying that the Father begets in terms of He has a Son. The Son is begotten in the sense He has a Father and the Spirit proceeds. So the Father begets, the Son is begotten and the Spirit proceeds. What does that mean? Well it basically means the Father is a Father because He has a Son. And the Son is a Son because He has a Father. And the

Spirit is a Spirit because there is a Father and a Son whose Spirit He is and who express themselves through Him. Now there is of course a lot of mystery to that and don't worry if you don't have a perfect handle on it all. The key point that this highlights is that the persons all rely on each other. The Father, the Son and the Spirit rely on each other.

The Son cannot be the Son without a Father. The Father cannot be a Father without His Son. That's why it uses the phrase eternally begotten and eternally proceeding because God has always been Father to His Son. God the Son has always been Son to His Father and the Spirit has always been the Spirit of God the Father and God the Son. They cannot be God without each other and they have never existed without each other. Their life is a shared life. And if you look at scripture you see something remarkable. You see the fact that these persons of the Trinity they seek to exalt one another. Each one seeks to glorify the other. Remember when Jesus was baptized, God didn't say from heaven,

I am the glorious Father. He said, you are my beloved Son. When God the Son speaks of the Holy Spirit, He says, I tell you the truth, it's to your advantage that I go away for you. But if I don't go away the helper will not come to you. But if I go I will send him to you. It's almost as though Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit is even better. His presence is even better than my presence. And the Spirit's great goal is to glorify the Father and the Son. When the Spirit of Truth comes He will guide you into all the truth for He will not speak on His own authority. But whatever He hears He will speak and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me but He will take what is mine and declare it to you. And so when you look at God you see the persons of the Trinity they rely on each other and they delight in each other and they share their life, their being, their existence with one another. And so when you look at God you are seeing a picture of perfect harmony, pure fellowship and astonishing love. And we are being reminded here that our worship is not just about what God has done. Our worship is also about who God is. Remember what Hannah prayed she said, there is none holy like the Lord for there is none besides you. There is no rock like our God. There is nothing like God. You think of the Father with his perfect loving, gentle care towards his Son. Think of how proud the Father is of his Son. You think of the Son who delights in his Father's love, who knows how secure he is, how treasured he is and nothing pleases the Son more than just to delight his Father. And think of the

[31 : 18] Holy Spirit who knows the Father and he knows the Son and he takes the desires, the purpose the goals, the plans of God, Father and Son and he actively engages in bringing these things to pass. God working together, sharing together, delighting in one another, a shared beautiful glorious life. And it would do us no harm to meditate on who God is. To think and to just let these things go round in our minds as we said at the very beginning on the glorious splendour of your majesty and on your wondrous works I will meditate. So we've learned two main things so far. God has life in and of himself. He is the source and the ground of existence. That life is shared beautifully among the three Persons of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit. And so we, if you like, you see God in his perfect completeness, don't you? He's just complete. He doesn't lack anything. He doesn't need anything. He's so full, so majestic. Everything is in perfect balance, perfect harmony. God has this glorious life within him. But there's one more thing and I think it's the most amazing thing of all. This self-existent, independent God is not keeping his life to himself because he has shared it with you. That's the very next thing that John says. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. So verse one and two speaks about the self-existence and completeness of God and then verse three tells us how he shares that life and gives life to creation. And the point I want to emphasise is that the independence of God tells us that God does not need a creation. God is independent.

He's complete. He does not lack anything. But by his sheer grace, he made you. And that's a reminder that you are the work of the Holy Trinity. That Father, Son and Spirit have shared together in this great work that has brought creation into being. And if you look at the world, you see the beauty and the complexity and the majesty of it all and we marvel at the God who made it. And it brings us back to that question. What are you for? What are you? What are you? Are you a tiny speck in an enormous universe? Are you a lump of stuff?

Are you a waste of space? No. You are the handy work of the Trinity. He's shared his life in you. And of course the great tragedy of the human race is that we have brought death into that life. God gave life to creation. We brought death into that life. And yet God does not stop there. God also shares his life with us in terms of redemption. Because the God who made us didn't just make us as

some cosmic work of art to be admired. The God that made us has made us because he wants us, he wants you as his very own. And even though sin has separated us from God, God the Holy Trinity has not given up. And as John is telling us, God the Son has come to be one of us and to make God known to us. No one has ever seen God, the only God. That's God the Son who's at the Father's side. He has made him known. He has come to give us, to give you the right to become children of

God. And this is reminding us that God has come to make us his own. Do you see what that means? It means that God the Father becomes your Father. And God the Son becomes your brother. And God the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in you. Therefore all that God is to himself, he is also that for you. And that's why the great goal for God is, well, what is it? That's a question. What is the great goal for God? Well, let's see what John 17 says. Let's read this version. What's God's goal here?

Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you've given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

[37 : 43] What's the goal? God's goal, which God the Son is describing here, is that you would be with him. That's what God wants for you. Now, I want to try and put it all together and you've done very well because there's so much information here, but I want to try and bring it all together. We have seen tonight the independence of God, this independent, life-sufficient God who does not need you and does not need me even for one second. God is not dependent on anyone. God does not need you or me even for one second. And yet that God's desire is that he would never be without you, not even for one second. The God who doesn't need you wants it that he is never, ever without you. And that's because the

God who has perfect life in himself is sharing that life with you. That's why he became one of us. That's why the word became flesh and dwelt among us. That's why Jesus came alongside us to redeem us, to restore us and to set us on a path that will only be complete when we are in glory at the Father side ourselves. And I hope you can see how much God has done for you, how great God's plans are for you, and how the God who has life in himself is opening himself up to you and saying, come, I want you with me. I hope that every one of us are just running to God and saying, God, I am yours. I am yours. Let's pray.

Our God, Father, Son and Spirit, we bow down before you and we acknowledge that you are the one who has life in and of himself. You are independent. You have no beginning, no end. You are above all things because you are God, the great iron. And yet you have given us life. And how we thank you for that. And how we thank you for your grace, that even though at one level you do not need us, yet at the same time your plan and goal for us is that you'd never be without us. And we can't understand how you could love us so much. But we thank you with all our hearts that you do. Amen.