

The Holy Trinity Part 3: John 17:4 - Shared Work

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[0 : 0 0] Well over the past few weeks in our evening services we have been studying the doctrine of the Trinity, the glorious truth that our God is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And it's a very profound topic to look at but a very glorious subject to study. And one of the amazing things about the doctrine of the Trinity is that at one level it shows us how God is beyond our understanding. We see the beyondness of God. His nature is stretching our minds to its limits. And of course that is logical. Every time you think of God it should stretch your mind. So we see how in many ways God is out of reach of our understanding.

And yet at the same time the doctrine of the Trinity shows us the nearness of God. The fact that God is revealing himself to us and he is sharing himself with us. This is our third sermon on the subject of the Trinity. In our first sermon we looked at the topic of shared nature. And we emphasised the fact that God has one nature or one substance as theologians will sometimes say. It highlights the fact that God cannot be divided. He cannot be separated. God is indivisible. And it also highlights the fact that God is unique. Nothing else has this God nature. It belongs to God and God alone. But this single nature, single substance is made up of three persons. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Therefore God is three in one. He is one substance and three persons. That's the basic foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Last time we looked under the heading shared life. And we saw the fact that God has life in and of himself. And that makes God unique. Our lives are all, the life that we have is all contingent on causes that have gone before us. And you can stretch that back as far as you want to go. But God is different. He has life in himself.

He is independent in a way that nothing else is. And he is the source of all other life.

But we also saw that that life that is within God is shared between Father, Son and Spirit. You have the Father who alone is Father to his Son. You have the Son who alone is the Son who alone is that precious child of God from all eternity. And you have the Spirit, the Holy Spirit who alone proceeds from Father, Son, Father and Son. And so the life of God is shared between these three. They rely on each other and they delight in each other.

[3 : 1 8] And we went on to see the glorious truth that that life that exists within God is shared with us. So that the God who is altogether independent of us, nevertheless wants to share himself with us. And as we said, God doesn't need you or me with him. Not even for a second.

And yet God's desire is that he would never, ever be without you. Not even for one second.

Our title this week is Shared Work. And the reason we have this title is because the Bible makes it very, very clear that the Persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit work together in order to accomplish the purposes of God. This is what is being pointed towards in the last verse that we read, John 17, Chapter 4, where Jesus, God the Son, says to his Father, I have glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And we are being reminded here and in many other parts of the Bible that the work that God undertakes is a shared work. And tonight we're going to look at this in three different areas. The first two we're going to look at very briefly. And the third we'll look at in a little bit more detail as we study this topic together between now and seven o'clock. So the first area we're going to look at is this, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit work together in creation. The Bible makes it abundantly clear from the very beginning that God is created. That's the, I was going to say it's the first thing we learn about God, but it's the, I think technically the second thing we learn about God. If you look at Genesis one, one first, first of the Bible says, in the beginning,

God created the heavens and the earth. We learn second thing we learn is that God is created. I'm sure you're thinking, what's the first thing we learn? Well, the first thing we learn is that God was in the beginning. He is the source of every other existence. He is there from all eternity. But the Bible gives us more details and it goes on to reveal that each person participates in that work of creation. The next verse Genesis one, two, 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 water. It's pointing us to the Holy Spirit's role in creation. John one, one speaks of God, the son's work in creation. In the beginning was the word that's a title for God, the son, Jesus Christ. In the beginning was the word, 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. So it was Jesus Christ participating in Genesis one. Of course he was. All things were made through him. The same truth is emphasized in Hebrews one, long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the heir of all things through whom also he created the world. Very interesting that verse, the last the last phrase in that verse because it's emphasizing that it is through the son that it is created. But of course it is God's work. He, God the father's work, he is creating. So God, father, son and spirit are all participating in the work of creation. And this is brought out beautifully albeit subtly in the terms of the creation of humanity. If you look at Genesis one, 26, what does it say? Then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over the over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. And we see in that statement, let us make man. It's just pointing us towards what the rest of scripture is teaching us, father, son and spirit working together in order to create.

And all of this highlights a very simple but a very glorious point. You, you are the creation of God the Holy Trinity. God himself, father, son and spirit, they deliberated, planned and worked together to bring you into being. And I think this is reflected in the sheer complexity of the human body. You just look at your own body, look at your hand, look at your fingers, look at your nails, look at your fingerprint, look at the cells of skin. If you took a knife and if you cut your hand and you went back to it a few days later, it would have fixed itself. And whether it's your heart beating every single second, every single week and month and year of your life, whether it is the signals in your brain coordinating your body, keeping you balanced, guiding and directing your steps, your conduct, your speech, your thoughts, whether it's your kidneys cleaning, filtering your blood, whether it is the circulation system carrying blood to every part of your body, then bringing it back to your lungs to be refreshed with oxygen, how it works for 10 seconds, let alone a lifetime, is astonishing. And yet we shouldn't be surprised at all because the father, the son and the Holy Spirit, they are very, very skilled and very capable. And this means that when God looks at you, there is a delight shared among Father,

[10:04] Son and Spirit because you are the workmanship of God himself. You are the work of his hands. And this emphasizes the fact that not is there simply a preciousness in all of creation, there is a particular preciousness about each and every single human being. If you go home and read Genesis one, you see that the processes engaged in for the creation of humanity are different.

God pauses, God speaks, God deliberates within himself, and then God creates. And it is only the human race, only you that is made in the image of God. And that is really what makes us precious as humans. We are not simply part of a meaningless set of processes that seem to be happening. We are God's workmanship. And of course, that's the reason why sin is such an awful thing. Because sin ruins precious people. Sin ruins people who, for whom God has far better and greater intentions. But that's also the reason why becoming a Christian is such a wonderful thing. Because really it is like a homecoming. Because when you come back to God, you are simply coming back to the one who made you. You're coming back to the place that you belong. And so God works together to create you. Father, Son and Spirit share in the work of creation. The second area I want us to think about is this. The

Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit work together in revelation. Now this is interesting because when we look at a chapter like Genesis one, we can be struck by many amazing things. We can be amazed at the fact that God is in the beginning. If we can stretch our minds to figure out what the beginning of time and reality and space could have been, the only thing that we can coherently understand is that God was there. He is the one from whom all else existence derives. We can be amazed at the fact that God is created from the complexity of the human race to the vastness of the universe. We can marvel at these things. And we can be moved by the fact that we are all the work of His hands. But as we think about all these glorious truths that Genesis one contains, we can easily miss what is probably the most amazing truth of all. The fact that God is talking to us. And that's the glory of the

Bible. God is speaking to us. And there are so many astonishing truths that derive from that. God is speaking to us in His Word from Genesis one to Revelation 22. God is talking to us because He wants us to know Him. And He wants us to know all about Him. And remember, this is all the more remarkable because we were trying to emphasize last time, God is independent. God stands on His own. He doesn't need any of us. He's absolutely self-sufficient and independent. A God cannot be a God if He is dependent on anything outside of Himself.

God is self-sufficient, independent. And yet God wants to speak to you. And God wants to reveal Himself to us. And I hope that you never ever lose sight of the glory of that truth, the fact that God wants to talk to you. He wants to talk to you tonight as we study His Word. He wants to tell you things and He wants you to know Him. And every single time we open our Bibles, we are hearing God's voice. But the remarkable thing about that work of Revelation, that's what we call the Bible, a revelation. God is revealing Himself to us in a special way. That work of Revelation is a shared work because God the Father speaks through the Bible. And that voice came from heaven, you are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased, one of thousands of speeches that the Bible records from God. God, the

[15 : 03] Holy Spirit speaks for no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man. So when you read through the Bible, you're not reading simply the works of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Men inspired people, men and women inspired by God to speak by the Holy Spirit. And God the Son speaks. And as He says, I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has given me a commandment, what to say and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore I say, as the Father has told me. And that last passage highlights something interesting, the fact that the Father, the Son and the Spirit, they don't just speak independently of each other. There is a cohesion and a coherence in all that God, the Trinity is saying to us. And the same thing is highlighted in a verse that we read in John 16. When the spirit of truth comes, that's the Holy Spirit, when the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak in his own authority, but what he ever 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. Jesus there is speaking to the disciples. He's preparing them for the fact that he is going to leave. And he is emphasizing the fact that through the apostles, the rest of the New Testament is going to be written under the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit. All of this is reminding us that every time we open our Bibles, we are hearing the message that God, the Holy Trinity wants us to hear.

And it's a reminder that reading your Bible is not just something to just tick off your daily list of chores. And it can easily be like that, can't it? Sometimes we think, I better read my Bible. I don't have much time. We pick it up and we try to read it as fast as we can. And we think, oh, I haven't read a whole chapter. I better try and get to the end of this chapter and we can try and blast through it. And it can become a little bit almost burdensome as a sort of chore. But we never wanted to be like that. Because the truth is, when we read our Bible, we are meeting with the triune God. And whether we read a little or a lot, we should be approaching the Bible in that way and saying, Lord, help me to listen. Help me to hear your voice. And so we see that the Father, the Son and the

Spirit are working together to reveal God through the pages of Scripture. And that's what makes the Bible so amazing. The Bible is a glorious presentation of divine truth.

It records the greatest events of history. It presents to us the most profound and relevant teaching. It touches on the deepest levels of emotion and experience in human life. It gives us the most precious promises that we've ever heard. It expresses the most beautiful words of poetry and imagery. It conveys the most vivid descriptions and it reveals the most awe-inspiring visions. It's an absolutely astounding revelation. The greatest material possession that any human being can have is the Bible. It is the work of the triune God.

But who is all that work for? You. God is not revealing himself for the sake of it. He's revealing himself to you because he wants you and me to know him. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit work together in revelation. Our third point, and this is where I want us to focus a wee bit more time. The Father, the Son and the Spirit work together in salvation.

[19 : 28] Indeed, the great message of the Bible is a message of salvation. Humanity has fallen from our original status. Genesis 1, we read how we were made in the image of God in a position of privilege and of blessing. And yet by the time you get to Genesis 3, we see that humanity sins and falls from the status that God has given us. We have lost our original condition. Sin has left us in a desperate need and God has every right to walk away. But God has not abandoned us. And the pages of the Bible present us with an account of redemptive history, a record of what God has done through the ages of history in order to redeem us, to rescue us from our desperate predicament. And that glorious work of salvation is a shared work between God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And I want us to think about this together for a few minutes now, but I have to confess we are only barely, barely scratching the surface. But we're going to try and say three things.

First of all, when it comes to the plan of salvation, the Father initiates, the Son accomplishes and the Spirit applies. As we just said, sin has left us all in a dreadful state. Sin has brought a brokenness to the human race that has affected every single generation that has ever lived. And we still see the wreckage of that all around us. And even in our own lives, we see the brokenness and the pain that sin causes. And sin gives God every reason to walk away and to abandon us. Remember, we keep saying God is independent, he doesn't need us. But the glorious truth revealed in the Bible is that even in the very aftermath of Adam's sin, God does not walk away. Instead, God initiates a plan.

And throughout the ages of history, the conflict between good and evil is going to reach a climax whereby the Savior will come and crush the kingdom of evil. God is going to send a rescuer and a Savior. And that Savior is Jesus Christ, God the Son. And he comes to accomplish all that is required to be done for salvation. That is what we were reading about in John 17.4, I've glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. The Father had a job for the Son. And the Son came to do it. Now is that a small job or a big job? Well, I think you know the answer. It is a huge task. What needs to be accomplished for humanity to be saved? Well, we need, first of all, somebody who can represent us as a fellow human. We need somebody who can bear the penalty of sin, who can die as a sacrifice that will cover our sins and turn away the wrath of God. We need somebody of such quality and standard who will satisfy all that God requires. We need somebody who can keep all the standards and requirements of God's law without any single fault. We need someone brave enough and strong enough to stand up to the power of the devil. We need somebody who can conquer and destroy the kingdom of evil. We need someone who can pay the penalty of sin, which is death itself. And we need somebody who will now be exalted over heaven and earth so that victory is certain. We need God himself to be our saviour. And Jesus Christ accomplishes every single one of these things. That's why he said it is finished. Everything that you need, Jesus did. And then the Holy Spirit applies all of this to the believer. The Holy Spirit calls us and draws us, as I hope he's drawing us all tonight. He softens our hearts. He comes and regenerates us into new spiritual life. The Holy Spirit comes and unites us to Christ through faith. Therefore, his death pays our penalty and his risen life gives us eternal life. And by the Spirit, we are adopted into the family of God with the Spirit himself coming into our hearts, giving us that Spirit that recognises God as our own Father, whereby we say Abba, Father. And the

Spirit comes and indwells us and begins a work of salvation so that those who are rescued from sin are being restored and transformed to become more and more like Jesus, more and more like God himself, back into the image of God that we were originally intended to be. And so in all of this, the Trinity is working together perfectly. Everything is covered.

Every step of the plan is achieved. Everything that needs to be done is done. And what do we do? We benefit and we thank God with all our heart. So the Triune God, God the Holy Trinity, has a perfect plan of salvation. Secondly, when it comes to the work of salvation, the Father sends, the Son comes and the Spirit remains. That's a great hope of the Gospel.

[25 : 42] The Father sends his Son and at the heart of that sending is the glorious message of the love of God. That's what probably the most famous version of the Bible teaches us, for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Why did God send his Son? Why did God send his precious, precious, eternally loved and cherished Son? Why did he do that? Because of how much he loves the world. Now when we think of the world, on the one hand we can think of many wonderful things, can't we? We can think of the beautiful sights to gaze at in this world.

And on our island here we have many of them. We think of people sharing in happy times, think of our own happy memories of life, so many things that have given us joy. We think of people doing good things to help one another and good things happening. God loves that world.

God loves that world. But on the other hand the world is also full of awful things, awful, awful things. You think of a housing scheme in one of our own cities that is ravaged with addiction and broken relationships. You think of a country ripped apart by war and conflict and all sorts of brutality. You think of scores of people throughout the world desperate for food, desperate for shelter, desperate for clean water. You think of lives broken by the betrayal and cruelty of others. In lots of ways the world is in a desperate mess.

But God loves that world. God loves that world so much that he gave. He gave his most precious possession of all. And that word gave in John 3.16. Behind that word lies the highest level of cost that we could ever imagine. God the Father giving, God his only Son. But he did it because behind that word also lies the highest level of love that we could ever imagine.

And so the Father sends. And the Son comes. And of course that coming for the Son involved a huge change. It was no small thing. That's why we refer to the coming of God the Son as his humiliation. Now we often use the word humiliation with the idea of being embarrassed about something. What we mean by this is not so much embarrassment but rather the idea of being made low. It's really what the word humiliation is pointed to. Being humble, being made low. That's exactly what happened to God the Son. As Philippians 2 tells us, have this mind amongst yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus. Who though he was in the form of God, so though the Son was equal with God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. It wasn't like he would just hold on to it and never let it go. But he emptied himself. By taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. The Son had to lay aside a huge amount. He had to take up the vulnerability of human flesh. He had to be exposed to the agony and pain that sin has brought into this world. He had to face the hostility, the rejection and the brutality of his very own people through whom it was through him that they had been made. He had to endure physical, emotional and spiritual agony and he had to taste death itself.

[30 : 23] And we can almost picture the Father and the Son discussing what's going to happen. Remember what we said in John 17.4, you've got the Father and the Son, you've got the Son speaking about the work that the Father gave him to do. So imagine the conversation if we can where that work was given. The Father preparing to send his Son and more and more details are established as to everything that this is going to involve. Humiliation to the lowest deaths and the Father says to the Son, will you go? And the Son replies, of course I will go. He has come to do the work that the Father has given him to do. And that work ultimately brought victory over sin. And the glorious outcome is the fact that now the Son has been raised and he's no longer on this earth, he is exalted at the right hand of God in heaven.

And so God the Father sent the Son, the Son came to this world for a spell, but now the Son has returned to heaven. But we still need God with us. And God knows that we cannot manage on our own. But yes, God does know that. So the Father sends, the Son comes, but the Spirit says, I will remain. That's what John 14 speaks about. Jesus said, I will ask the Father, he will give you another helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. And that's the glory of the abiding presence of God, the Holy Spirit. He doesn't just apply salvation to us and then leave us to it. He applies salvation to us by coming to make us his dwelling place. That's why if you are a Christian, if you become one which you can tonight, you will never, ever be without God.

And so we have the Father who has sent. He has sent everything that we need. We have the Son who has come and he has done everything that we couldn't do for ourselves and we have the Holy Spirit who remains, who will never, ever leave us. The Holy Trinity is working together so perfectly. So we thought about the plan of salvation. We thought about the work of salvation. Thirdly and briefly, when it comes to receiving salvation, the Father promises the Son secure and the Spirit guarantees. And this is why you and I can have assurance as Christians. And this is an area where we can often make mistakes because sometimes people lack assurance and assurance is not of the essence of faith. Somebody can be a Christian long before they ever get assurance. And I think there's probably many people like that in here tonight. But we can have assurance because assurance does not come from feelings.

It comes from theology. It comes from what God teaches us in his word. And God, the Father promises us salvation. He says, whoever believes in my Son will not perish but have everlasting life. That is an unchanging promise from the unchanging God. A promise that can never and will never be broken. God, the Father promises you that you will be saved if you trust in Him. And that promise is absolutely certain because God, the Son has secured everything that we need. So can somebody like you have their sins forgiven? Yes, because God, the Son has secured justification. Can someone like you really be a child of God?

Yes, you can because God, the Son has secured adoption for all who come to Him in faith. Can somebody like you really make it to heaven? Yes, you can because God, the Son has secured your inheritance and it's all because of what He has secured. And just in case you are still unsure, God, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in you as a guarantee. So we read at the very beginning, in Him you also, when you heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation and believed in Him were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of His glory.

[36 : 18] So if you are a Christian or if you become one, what is the guarantee that you are safe? Is it your own strength of faith? I've got really strong faith and I know I'll be safe.

Everyone's faith wobbles. Is it the experiences that you may have? Some remarkable thing has happened in my life and by that I know that I'm safe? No. Everybody's experience is different and we shouldn't really be placing one as better than the other. Is it the visible changes that take place in your life? Well, that's a great result of coming to faith, but it's not the guarantee of your salvation. It's none of these things because we are not the ones who guarantee anything. The guaranteeing of your salvation and your eternal security is done by God, the Holy Spirit Himself. As a Christian, you are safe forever because God, the Holy Spirit says, I guarantee it. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee that you are safe. I just heard my watch beep for seven o'clock, which means we're near the end.

There's so much more that we could say. There's so much more we could say. We've scratched the surface. The key point I hope we've emphasized is the fact that the work of salvation is a shared work. The Father initiates, the Son accomplishes, the Spirit applies. The Father sends, the Son comes, the Spirit remains. The Father promises, the Son secures, the Spirit guarantees. Salvation is a shared work between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit and what a perfect, perfect work it is. That just leaves us with one last question.

Who is all that work for? You. Let's pray. God, Father, Son and Spirit, we bow before you and we marvel at the work that you have done. We thank you, O God, that you are our Father and that you call us all to faith and salvation. We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you have come to be our Savior, that you might become our brother and God the Holy Spirit, we thank you that you remain with us in us and that you are our guarantee and so we marvel at you, O God, we worship you and we pray that we would live for you. Open all of our hearts so that we might see our great God more clearly. Amen.