Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Earlier we read **Deut. 6:4** where it says, “*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one*.” And for God’s Old Testament people, those words were the equivalent of our Apostles’ Creed. They were known as the *Shema*. They were recited over and over again by the Jews, and they still are by Jewish people today. And there is also the first commandment: “*You shall have no other gods before me*.” In other words, don’t be like the other nations, which have *many* gods; worship me as your *one* God. So the idea of ‘one God’ was a central truth for God’s Old Testament people.

So now think about our text in **Mark 12**. Having been asked to identify the most important command, Jesus quoted Deut. 6:4, “*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one,*” and then carried on with verse 5 and what it says about loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. But what is Jesus’ main message throughout the Gospels? I am the Son of God, sent by the Father; believe in me and worship me as your Saviour and Lord. So … there is the Father and the Son??!! … but that’s two!? And then it got even harder when Jesus started talking about the Father and Him sending the Holy Spirit. So … there is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit??!! … but that’s three?! But what Jesus was saying in our text was “*the Lord is one*.” So … there is one God, but there is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit??!! This sure sounds like new maths; everyone knows that 1+1+1=3, but this sounded like 1+1+1=1?! How could this be?

It is hardly surprising, then, isn’t it, that this was *the* doctrine that the church really struggled with for at least 400 odd years. Are the Son and the Spirit truly God? Are they eternal God? Is Jesus truly human? How? And I am pretty sure that even if you believe the doctrine of the Trinity, it still blows your mind – 3 and 1; 1 and 3!? How is this possible?

Well, we are going to do three things this afternoon: First off, I will **state the doctrine of the Trinity** as simply as possible, then we want to see **how it is laid out in the Bible**, and thirdly and lastly, we want to see **why it matters**? And our aim is to spend most of our time on that last point.

1. So first of all, the doctrine of the Trinity, stated, as simply as possible.
   1. Referring to **Deuteronomy 6:4**, Q/A 25 says, “Since there is one God, why do you speak of three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?” And the answer? “Because that is how God has revealed Himself in His word: these three distinct persons are one, true, eternal God.”
      1. So boys and girls, if I ask you How many Gods are there? your answer will be? One. There is only one God. And if I ask you, how many persons are there in the Godhead? Your answer will be: Three – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So the simplest form of the doctrine of the Trinity is that **there is one God who exists in three persons**.
   2. So now you are probably hoping that I will give you a cute illustration or analogy of the Trinity so that this makes sense to you. But sadly, despite many attempts over the centuries to illustrate the Trinity, one way or another, every illustration fails to capture the beautiful mystery that is one God in three persons:
      1. So you may have heard before about **the man who is** a husband at home and the mayor of the town and an employer. But this analogy is quite wrong because it is just one person who has three *roles* or *modes*. It is the error known as modalism – that God just operates in different modes at any point in time.
      2. Another analogy that fails in the same way is that the Trinity is like **the three states of H2O**, liquid, ice, and vapour. But that too fails because no set quantity of water can ever exist as water/steam/ice at the same time, and God is always Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
      3. Another common illustration of the Trinity is **the Sun**, which is a star that gives of light and heat. But this is an error known as Arianism, which views Jesus and the Spirit has creations of the Father that are not equal in glory. But the Son and the Spirit are eternal God, with the Father.
      4. Or then there is perhaps the most common analogy of the Trinity, which is the **three leaf clover**; have you heard that one? One clover leaf with three leaves. But this illustration fails because each leaf is only a *part* of the clover, while each person of the Trinity is *fully* God. And this is the error known as partialism – that each person is just part of God.
      5. And even that math equation I used in the beginning of the sermon, 1+1+1=1, fails to illustrate the mystery of the Trinity. You see, there are three real, distinct persons in the Trinity. The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Spirit and the Spirit is not the Son or the Father. So 1 person +1 person +1 person = 3 persons. And yet, as we saw in the Athanasian Creed, they are not 3 Gods; they are 1 God – 1 in essence or being.
      6. And all of this is why the Trinity is a mystery that cannot be comprehended by human reason but is understood only through faith and is best confessed in the words of the historic Creeds of the church.
      7. And congregation, rather than being uncomfortable that there is beautiful mystery and complexity in the being of God, we should rejoice in this! He is God, after all! Right?
      8. So the doctrine of the Trinity is that there is one God who exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. Well, I called the Apostles and Nicene and Athanasian Creeds summaries of what the Bible teaches about the Trinity. So let’s spend a bit of time seeing **the Trinity in the Bible**.
   1. And we begin with **one** God.
      1. And our text, which quotes Deut. 6:4, declares in very plain language that God is one; it is a key teaching of the Bible. The other reference in the Lord’s Day footnote is **1 Corinthians 8:4-6** (p856). And it is worth turning there, for a moment. The context of these verses is a question about whether or not it was right to eat food that had been offered to idols. And Paul’s answer is, It is OK to eat such food, because idols are not real, because there is only one God! Look how he puts it: “*Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." 5 For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth- as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"- 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist*.” So even though Paul refers to the Father *and* the Lord Jesus Christ, His point here is – there is only one God. So here we see two persons, yet one God.
   2. But let’s look at more verses that reveal the three persons of this one God.
      1. And it is hinted at, already, in the **first three verses of the Bible**! Way back in Genesis 1 we read about God the Creator, the Spirit of God who hovered over the waters, and God saying, “*Let there be light*.” And John 1:1 calls Jesus “*the Word of God … by whom all things were made*.” So with the help of the NT, we see that Father, Holy Spirit, and Word-Son are present in the first 3 verses of the Bible!
      2. And then in **Genesis 1:26**, God says, “*Let us make man in our image*.” That’s plural, or more than one person, language, already in Genesis!
      3. And then if we fast forward to the baptism of Jesus in **Matthew 3**, we see Jesus being baptized, the Spirit of God descending on Him like a dove, and the Father, speaking from heaven about being pleased with the Son. So the Son is not the Father and the Spirit is not the Son – they are three persons!
      4. And in the Great Commission of **Matt 28:19**, Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize people “*into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*.”
      5. And several times in **John 14-16**, Jesus repeatedly promised that He and the Father would send the Holy Spirit to believers.
      6. And finally, we often close our services with the Trinitarian benediction of **2 Cor. 13:14**: “*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all*.”
      7. And the fact that each person of the Trinity gives us divine blessings and is worthy of our worship reveals that they are each fully God.
      8. So the Bible teaches one God who exists in three persons.
3. Well, thirdly and lastly then, **does the doctrine of the Trinity really matter**? Do any of you like quizzes? Do you watch the Chase? The other day, one quiz question was ‘What does the L stand for in HTML? And I said, “Language.” Who here knew that? Well, when I said ‘language,’ Mrs H said, How did you know that? And I replied, I have no idea; I must have heard it somewhere and stored it. But even though I know what HTML stands for, I do not know how to program in HTML. For me it really is **useless information**. Well, it’s possible that at this point in the sermon, some of you are thinking, I know about the Trinity, but is it just useless information? Does it really matter?
   1. Well, it matters, first of all, because it is who God is; it is how He has revealed Himself; it is **the truth about God**.
      1. You see, the example I used before about HTML illustrates how we usually think about knowledge – it is only really good if we can use it in some practical way; if it will help us get ahead, somehow; if it is on the test! But knowledge is important also because of the truth!
         1. Consider this illustration – I am 50 years old, male, grey haired, 184cm tall, right handed, blue eyed, my name is Andre, and I am married to Anita. Now, if someone was talking to you and they said they were going to visit St Georges Rd and they wanted to talk to the Pastor and they asked you for a description, and you said, he is late 30s, blonde, about 175cm tall, green eyes, and he is married to Juanita, it maybe an honest mistake, but you have not described who I am. And if that person were to turn up here and ask to speak to a late 30s, blonde haired, green eyed bloke, who is married to Juanita, whoever heard them make this request would say, Sorry, no one here like that; I think you are at the wrong church.
         2. And the truth about God, as we have seen, is that He is one God who exists in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So if your god is just one, like Islam or Buddhism, for example, or just many, like the gods of Hinduism, for example, then you do not know the true God!
   2. And from the truth about who God is flow at least two practical benefits:
      1. The first has to do with **the gospel** itself. Earlier in the service, we read and confessed the words of the Athanasian Creed. It is the most exhaustive of the three Creeds about the Trinity. And after carefully explaining what the Trinity is and what the Trinity is not, it says, paraphrased, “You must believe this about the Trinity to be saved.”
         1. Let’s take **John 3:16** as an example, the simplest and most well-known Gospel verse in the Bible, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*.”
            1. Now, the Father can’t give His Son if they are not distinct persons.
            2. And let me as you this question. As a believer, are you a son or daughter of God? You are. But John 3:16 describes Jesus as God’s “only Son.” And this is because Jesus is the Son of God in a way that you and me are not. He is God’s ***natural*** Son and we are *adopted* children. So Jesus shares His essential divine being with the Father. It is why He said, in John 10:30, “*I and the Father are One*,” and in John 14:9. “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*.”
            3. And once Jesus had done what He needed to do on the cross, He ascended to heaven. So how do we receive what He did for us on the cross? We receive it by the **Spirit** who is sent from heaven to live within us. Listen to how Galatians 4:6 puts it: “*God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts*” so that we might call Him our Father. Father, Son, Spirit – three persons, one God.
         2. So the gospel is Trinitarian. To know God *savingly* is to know Him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And that means that if I preached that God is just one God or that He appears sometimes as Father and at other times as Son or Spirit, or that the Father created the Son, or that Jesus was not a *real* human being or that He was *only* a human being, then you would not hear the gospel. So is the doctrine of the Trinity of practical use? Yes! It matters *for* *your* *salvation*!
      2. But I would like us to end with one more practical benefit of the doctrine of the Trinity. And I borrow this one, with just a few words added or deleted, from an article by Pastor Justin Dillehay on the Gospel Coalition website. And he explains that the kind of God we have determines the **kind of relationship we will have with Him**.
         1. Have you ever asked yourself this question: Why did God create you and save you? With us, we seek friends or a marriage partner because of loneliness and a desire for companionship. And people often talk about having children as *adding* something to their lives or *enriching* their lives as human beings. So did God create you and save you because He was missing something?
         2. Well, what we have seen today is that before the world was created, God existed in three persons. So God had family, we could say. He was Father before humans existed. And He already had an eternally begotten Son, the radiance of His glory and the exact imprint of his nature ([Heb. 1:3](https://www.esv.org/Heb.%201%3A3/)), who was at His side ([John 1:18](https://www.esv.org/John%201%3A18/)) and was loved by the Father ([John 17:24](https://www.esv.org/John%2017%3A24/)). They had perfect unity, fellowship, communion, love.
         3. So you and I aren’t the result of some human-shaped hole in the Father’s heart. No no no. And listen to this!: You and I represent the **overflow** of the Father’s eternal love for His Son—it is as though the Father had said, “Son, this love of ours is just too good to keep to ourselves. So together with our eternal Spirit, let us make man in our own image, so that others might see and experience our love and unity and fellowship!”
         4. It doesn’t come anywhere near close to capturing this perfectly, but imagine that you have been asked to be part of a team.
            1. Sounds good, right? But then you learn that they approached you just because they needed one female on the team, or because none of them wanted to be goalie, or because you were the only one left after every one else had been chosen, or some reason like that. That would make you feel pretty stink, yes? You would mope onto the pitch and do as little as you could get away with.
            2. But what if they had a female and a goalie and there were still plenty of others they could pick from but they really wanted you on the team! That would be fantastic. There would be high fives all round and maximum effort!
         5. Well, you are a part of God’s family because of the Father’s overflowing love for the Son!! They don’t need you but they have loved you before the creation of the world and chosen you to be a part of the eternal fellowship family!!
            1. The Father gave Himself to you in creation and redemption. And the Son came to live and die for your salvation. And the Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son into this world, to live inside you and bring you to Christ—and through Christ to the Father—so that you might be taken into His family, surrounded by His life and love, to glorify and enjoy Him forever.

And that, people of God, is the kind of salvation that only the Trinitarian God can offer.

This is the doctrine of the Trinity. It’s more than just a mystery or a mind-bending math problem; this is our God, who loves us who gave us His Son, by the Holy Spirit.

May your love for your God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, increase in every way. Amen.