

The Magnificent Story: THE TRINITY AND BEAUTY

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We cover chapters 3 AND 4 this week in “The Magnificent Story.” These two chapters describe the Trinity & the beauty of the relationship within the godhead. Several people in the Bible are mentioned as being beautiful (Sarai, Rebekah, Rachel, Tamar, Job’s daughters, Vashti, Esther, & baby Moses). Yet, beauty has as much to do with relationships & function as with appearance. It’s not often we say feet are beautiful, but Romans 10:15 says, *“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”* Our appearance is important but is not ultimate. We should be good stewards of our bodies, but people deemed beautiful by the culture may be deficient in more important traits like hospitality, kindness, faith, & love. Proverbs 11:22 says: *“Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.”* We have memories & awareness of the “cool kids” (of any age) who reject those they deem inferior. Like every believer, I have wrestled with the concept of the Trinity, but I have seldom thought about “beauty” in spiritual terms. I was intrigued to find the word in several Psalms. Our culture stresses beauty, especially for women. Women can be led to believe they are only significant if they are outwardly beautiful as defined by the culture (& fashion is always changing, keeping us addicted to buying new products). Since beauty can lead us astray, some Christians take the other extreme. They use 1 Peter 3:1-6 to resist outward beauty. Both are shrunken stories. The redemptive note of beauty is seen in the relationship of the Trinity. It is fascinating that the New Testament never hints at the appearance of Jesus. The Scriptures don’t focus on what He looked like; it was His magnificent story and gracious invitation to all that attracted so many people to follow Him.

John 1:14-18

And the Word became flesh & dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, & cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'")

¹⁶ And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace & truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

What a beautiful, good, and true story this is – how Jesus moved into our neighborhood. Last week, Jim Smith described two shrunken gospel stories: one didn’t need God (the UMC pastor who didn’t believe in the deity of Christ, the resurrection, or the authority of the Bible) and the other story was of an angry God who sent Jesus to die for our sins and He is still made at us. While there are components of truth in both – social action is good, and Jesus died for our sins, neither embraced the fullness of God. This explains why we need the Trinity.

1.) The Trinity. Draw a circle with a circle within. The word “God” goes in the center. This is one God, not three Gods, represented in three ways. There are two ways to describe this:

A.) **Relationship** At the top is “Father” on the sides, “Son,” and “HS.” As “Holy, Holy, Holy” goes, “God in three persons, blessed Trinity.” God is one.” They are united. As Jim says, “This is not a Family Feud” (where the Father is angry, and Jesus takes the beating). Jesus said, “*If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.*” At a memorial service on Friday, a young man named Adam told me about how his dad spoke words of comfort to him when he admitted he had a drug/alcohol addiction. Like the father in the Prodigal Son story, Adam’s father asked, “How can I help,” rather than condemning him. Adam was amazed. So many times, we live with judgment and in judgment. I know I can do both side of this (guilt, anger).

B.) **Function.** Draw a second circle with “God” in the middle and the words “Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.” These words may be more helpful, as we think about the function/roles each provide. In the beginning, God created the heavens/earth. The central motif of the Bible is God as redeemer and in its ultimate form, was Jesus. The Holy Spirit was given to empower and sustain us.

We need all three functions, not just one. Colossians 1:15-20 says it so well. *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were **created**, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things **hold together**. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to **reconcile** to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.* When people say, “I think all the religions are the same” or “Jesus was just a good teacher,” they do not know our magnificent story. Jesus makes the beautiful, good, and true God known. He is magnificent, not shrunken.

God is beyond our understanding. Our five-year-old granddaughter is in a Christian school kindergarten in Midland, TX. asked me Wednesday on Facetime, “Who made God?” If I could answer the question, I’d BE God. I can’t. God is beyond my reason. This is why I worship. We only worship what we cannot understand. If we could explain God, we would not worship God.

Years ago, some missionaries went to a remote corner of Africa to work with a primitive tribe. They were uncertain how they would be received, so they decided to give the tribe a gift as a sign of goodwill. As they flew over the area, a bright, shiny new plow was parachuted down to the tribe. The plow would help the natives as they farmed. At least that was the intent. They were shocked by what they found a few days later when they came to the encampment. The natives had never seen a plow before. They didn’t know what their strange-looking instrument which was dropped out of the sky was supposed to do. Not knowing what to do, they put the plow on a pedestal and were worshipping it. The plow was to help them farm, not be worshiped.

We will worship something. It is in our nature. Cars need gasoline or batteries; sailboats need wind; fish need water; teenagers need pizza – so we need worship to truly live. We WILL worship something or someone. When we cease to worship God, we will worship anything.

2.) The Transcendentals. Draw another circle with a circle within. Write in the middle, "Unity" and "Beauty, Goodness, Truth" at the top/sides. We want to worship what is beautiful, good, and true.

One of my axioms is: *"Football is a very fickle god to worship."* Years ago, a guy named Keith McDonald was called up from AAA to the St. Louis Cardinals. He had hit one homerun in 177 at bats in AAA. On his first at bat in St. Louis, he hit a homerun. He was only the 73rd ML player to do it. The crowd went wild and yelled for him to come out of the dugout, but he wouldn't do it because of his respect for the game and also because Tony LaRussa, the Cardinals manager, told him not to. But on his second AB, he also hit a homerun. He was only the 2nd ML player to hit a HR on his first two at bats. This time his teammates made him come out and take a bow. That was a beautiful, good, and true moment – but we don't worship Keith McDonald or baseball or sports...why...because *"sports is a very fickle god to worship."* Even after you win one championship, that's not enough. You want to win again and again. It's good and beautiful and true in the moment – but short-lived and does not last forever. Something can be beautiful, good, and true – but there's one thing missing – *"And they all lived happily ever after."* Something can be good...but not be ultimate. Enjoy them but do not worship them. We have replaced the God in the Magnificent Story with a shrunken God.

Sports is one place of worship. Money is probably #1. Sex, power, and fame – almost anything can take God's place. Being beautiful can, too. Remember the devil's temptation of Jesus – *"all this I will give you if you but fall down and worship me."* We will worship something or someone. We can't help it. We're human. That's what humans do. But the greatest joy comes to those who worship the Eternal God.

There is one source of ultimate beauty, goodness, and truth – the Trinity. Their relationship is beautiful, good, and true. The transcendentals of our culture today seem to be: anger, anxiety, and fear. That is not a good trio. As a result of understanding their relationship and function we are drawn to one conclusion: worship.

That is why we come to worship. It is the celebration of God. When we worship God, we celebrate Him. We praise Him for who He is and for the beauty of His creation, the goodness of His redemption, and the truth of His Word. That is why we are here today.

Annie Dillard quote: *"Why do people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute? On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of the conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. We should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares. They should lash us to the pews. For the sleeping God may wake some day and take offense, or the waking God may draw us out to where we can never return."*

Why are we here today? Hopefully, to see our friends. Hopefully to learn something about the Bible. Hopefully to find a way to serve others. We want go grow in our faith and understanding. We want to reach out and Help Others Follow Jesus. But ultimately, the question before us it not for us to be consumers, viewing a worship service as a performance ("Give me something – entertain me"). It's not "What did I get out of it?" The church

ultimately is not about providing entertainment or building self-esteem, or to build friendships – the church exists for the worship of God. The music, the message, and even the sacraments all have the ultimate goal of getting back in touch with God. The point of worship is to remind us – who owns the house? And the answer is – the Trinity. God the Father, Son, and Spirit in perfect relationship. The Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, working in perfect function together. The Lord has set eternity in our hearts. And He has come full of beauty, goodness, and truth. He has set eternity in our hearts. He has made everything beautiful in its time.