

Christ Community Covenant Church  
Before Jesus was King, He was Son  
Pastor Mike Brown—March 24, 2013

The Big Idea: This is my last chance to be up front, so I want to tell you about the very heart of Christianity: the relationship shared by the Father and Son and our invitation into it.

*As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' you say, 'The Lord has need of it'; and immediately he will send it back here."*

*They went away and found a colt tied at the door, outside in the street; and they untied it. Some of the bystanders were saying to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They spoke to them just as Jesus had told them, and they gave them permission. They brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it; and He sat on it.*

*And many spread their coats in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting:*

*"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!" Mark 11:1 – 10*

## **Message**

### Introduction

In his latest book, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, Eugene Peterson and his son, who at the time was studying literature at CU, had an interesting conversation. His son claimed that every great author only wrote one book, that all their books were variations of the one book. His son went on to claim that in all the years he had listened to his dad preach, he always heard only one sermon. Of course, as you can imagine, Eugene Peterson protested loudly, claiming that he worked hard each week to make Scripture come alive in the context of the lives of those in his church. But, finally he understood what his son was telling him.

Well, as I imagine the future, this is the last time I will stand before you as your pastor. And it is tempting to tell you the many ways you have touched my life and Linda's. Perhaps that will happen another time. When Jesus knew the cross awaited Him, He did not spend his last hours reminiscing with the boys; rather, He spent His last hours telling the disciples the most important things. That's what I want to do: to tell you the most important thing I know, that which is the very heart of Christianity. I've been telling you this for more than six and a half years at every opportunity I've had to stand before you and in every conversation I've had with you. The guys at male call have heard it weekly for years. It is my one sermon. It is in laser-sharp focus. I want to say it plainly: "God years for relationship with us so that we might enjoy the fullness of being His sons and daughters. He sends His Spirit to unite us with Jesus in love. Jesus then leads us into oneness with our Father."

If I want this for me, then I must also want it for my neighbor. And it starts with the Trinity...

### Who is God?

Today is Palm Sunday. It is the day we remember Jesus entering Jerusalem for the final time, His triumphal entry the week before His crucifixion. With song and Scripture we have remembered this day.

On this day as Jesus triumphantly enters Jerusalem as Israel's long awaited King, He fulfills the prophesy of Zechariah spoken some 500 years before Jesus:

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!*

***Behold, your king is coming to you;  
He is just and endowed with salvation,  
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.***  
~ Zechariah 9:9 (NASB)

And he fulfills the promise made to King David about 500 years before that. The donkey is important. During that time, a conquering king who entered a defeated city on a war horse meant to rule the city with an iron fist. But the conqueror who entered on a donkey meant to be a benevolent king.

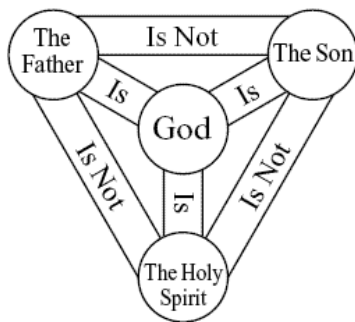
King Jesus enters mounted on a donkey. And we know that the reason He was crucified was because He didn't fit the definition of "king" as the Jewish rulers had expected. In fact, now we know Jesus by many names: King, Lord, Savior, Messiah, Christ, Emmanuel, Son of man, Son of God, rabbi, Friend, Master, Word of God...together we could come up with many more names. What we call Jesus is so important to Jesus that He asked this of His disciples:

***Who do you say that I am?***  
~ Matthew 16:15; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20 (NASB)

Today, to talk about the heart of Christianity I want to focus on only one name, the name that has identified Jesus for all of eternity: Son. It is important that we get this eternal name right because it dramatically influences how we think of God and the relationship we have with Him. Recall that we have quoted AW Tozer many times from this pulpit:

***What you think about God is the most important thing about you.***

Here is where the Trinity comes in. we cannot understand the heart of Christianity without talking about the Trinity. If you are like me, perhaps you cannot remember the last time you heard a sermon on the Trinity. It is a mystery, we say, so we often ignore it. Here is the doctrine: God is three persons; each person is fully God; there is only one God. We use illustrations of water and eggs and the like to explain it. Here is a drawing that will help; it is called The Shield of the Trinity; it has been around for more than 1000 years.



Here's why knowing this is important: On that last night before His crucifixion, as Jesus was telling the disciples the most important things, He said this to them:

***If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.***"

***Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father; and it is enough for us."***

***Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'show us the Father'?"***

~ John 14:7 – 9 (NASB)

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on the donkey, He was all the things they said about Him, including king; however, He is first and foremost eternal Son. Knowing Jesus as eternal Son tells us volumes about God. You see, for all eternity before creation, whatever we imagine that to be like, Jesus existed as Son. Jesus says as much, again, during that last evening:

***Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was...for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.***

~John 17:5, 24 (NASB)

And this is why the doctrine of the Trinity is crucial to us: if Jesus is the eternal Son, that means He must have had an eternal Father. Before Jesus was any of those names we ascribe to Him, He was first Son; therefore, God the Father, whom we call Healer, Rock, Redeemer, Fortress, Creator, Ruler, Lord, King...was first and foremost Father.

You see, if there was never a time when the Son was not Son, then there was never a time when the Father was never Father. God the Father has been Father for all of eternity. Imagine God the Father, for all eternity before creation loving the Son: adoring, loving giving unconditionally to the Son. And the Son, adoring, loving, giving unconditionally to the Father. And the role of the Holy Spirit? The Spirit is the very personification of the relationship between Father and Son. Father loves Son in the Spirit; Son loves Father in the Spirit. The Father-Son relationship is the very heart of Christianity.

(Note: Scripture never tells us the Father or Son loves the Spirit nor that the Spirit loves the Father or Son.)

If we know Jesus as eternal Son, then the doctrine of the Trinity tells us that God the Father has always been and will always be intrinsically outward focused, other-centered, life-giving, eternally delighting in His Son – ***All that He does is as loving Father; His only motivation is love.***

### Who Are We?

What does this mean for us? Evident in the Trinity we see the Father-Son relationship through the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, imagine such a magnificent Father-Son relationship through the power of the Spirit that the Three long to share it with others. It should be easy for us to imagine...have you ever had an experience that you long to share with another? Of course you have, and you couldn't wait to share it. The better the experience the more your eagerness grows to share it.

So, God created mankind to share in this relationship. This is so important that the Apostle John tells us this in the very beginning of his gospel immediately after ensuring we know who Jesus is. He says:

***But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God... ~ John 1:12 (ESV)***

Children of God, that is who we are. Now, that should not be news to you. It appears throughout the New Testament and you have heard it from this pulpit many times. But, let's not rush past this. There are several important implications to this, all consequences of the Trinitarian nature of God.

First, as we said above, the Father-Son relationship is so profound that God wants to share it with us. He wants to share it with us so much that He gave us His Spirit, the very essence of the relationship between Father and Son that ***by the Spirit*** and ***by God's grace*** we do indeed share in the fellowship of the Father-Son relationship. Just as Son Jesus gets His identity as Son by being in relationship with the Father, we also get our identity as children of God by being in relationship with our Father, God. Do we really grasp this? Do we really understand that we are not created to be servants or slaves or even friends of God but to be brought into the very family of God, to be sons and daughters of God in the very same relationship with the Father as Jesus has.

Want more proof? Just look at the first two words of the prayer Jesus taught us: ***Our Father*** (Matthew 6:9). And, Scripture tells us that Jesus is our brother (Romans 8:29).

Second, through the Spirit we are ***in Christ***. This means that when God looks at us He looks at us with the same loving gaze as He looks at His eternal Son; when we love God we love Him with the same love as His eternal Son. Jesus has repented for us, obeyed for us, prayed for us, died for us, risen for us, loves our Father for us, has faith in God for us, receives God's grace, connects us together in Him...He is the perfect child we can never be in this lifetime, and yet ***in Him*** we are the perfect children; imagine the freedom and liberty and delight that would come to us if we could only grasp this. It is indeed finished; He does it all for us.

Third, with ***Christ in us*** we are actually becoming like Him. The fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians (5:22 – 23) and elsewhere are simply characteristics of Christ. Marriage is God's favorite metaphor for our relationship with Him. In marriage the two become one. The work of the Holy Spirit in us is to unite us with Christ; we are becoming one with Him. Spiritual theologians for centuries have recognized that union with God is the goal of Christianity (John 17:20 – 26). The Spirit is uniting us with Christ and Christ is leading us into oneness with ***our*** Father.

This is what the Trinity means to us; this is why the doctrine of the Trinity is so important to us and sets us apart from every other religion on the planet.

### How Are We Living?

What are the implications of this for how we live?

Over the centuries in Christianity there has been a debate about what to make of God and His actions in our lives and in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament. The debate is this: do events interpret God? Or, does what we know about God interpret the events? For example: in the Old Testament we read of God directing the deaths of many people. If we let the events interpret God, then we act out of our own understanding of right and wrong and may find ourselves accusing God of being unfair and unloving. However, if we first understand God as loving Father from all eternity, then we interpret those Old Testament events as God's wrath expressed out of love. We may not understand it fully, but it will be true.

I believe that God's nature interprets the events. If, as I have said above, God the Father has always been Father and all He does is as loving Father, then I must look at all of those stories in the Bible, including the carnage; all of the good and the horrors in the world today; and all the events of my life through this lens. God is eternal Father and always acts as Father, outward-focused, giving, and loving. That is why...

***We can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.*** Romans 8:28 (*The Message*)

Certainly some of us have trouble with the idea of "Father." We have had a very bad experience with our own fathers, we distort love, on and on...we are broken people raised by broken people. However, that does not change who God is and how He acts toward us. It is our understanding of "Father" that needs to be transformed. That, in fact, is our journey with God as we become transformed into the likeness of His Son. It is a "terribly wonderful" journey of transformation.

Paul again:

***God knew what He was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love Him along the same lines as the life of His son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity He restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in Him. After God made that decision of what his children should be like, He followed it up by calling people by name. After He called them by name, He set them on a solid basis with Himself. And then, after getting them***

*established, He stayed with them to the end, gloriously completing what He had begun.* Romans 8:29 – 30 (*The Message*)

### Conclusion

We may think that the Trinity is just a bunch of theological double-speak. It is not. It was a doctrine conceived out of hard-fought discernment among early Christians to explain what the first Christ followers knew but hadn't put into words. We ignore it at our own peril. ***The Father-Son relationship is the very heart of Christianity.*** Some say that the blood of Jesus is the "scarlet thread" that runs through the Bible. I think this is not quite right. I think the thread running through the Bible is the Father-Son relationship and our invitation as individuals and as a Church to enter in.

In the 300s there was a great heresy that arose in the church led by a prominent bishop named Arius. He believed that the Son was a created being, not an eternal being. This led to great debates over the nature of God; much of what you have heard this morning comes from those debates. The consequences of Arius' belief are enormous for our view of God. The Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons retain the essence of Arius' belief in a created son, not an eternal Son. And, sadly, many Christians continue to view God as something other than eternal Father acting toward them only out of a Father's perfect love.

Arius was a master of public relations (PR). He and his followers created jingles and songs to make their point. One such jingle was: *"There was a time when the son was not."* Christians countered with jingles of their own. One might be very familiar to you:

***Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, amen.***

All four of our founding creedal statements have come as a result of battle over great heresy in the Church. Out of this Arian Heresy came the Athanasian Creed, which tells us the basis of our faith, the nature of the Trinity, and the nature of the incarnate Christ. Here it is, in part (reprinted fully in the sermon notes):

#### ***Athanasian Creed (abbreviated):***

***Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that they hold the catholic [small "c"; the universal Christian church] faith; which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance.***

***Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.***

***This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.***

As you can see, the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ have been central to our faith since the earliest days.

One last word about the importance of this...we often ask the "Why?" question. We say that God never answers that question. That is because we don't know the God of the Trinity. God always answers that question. He says, "I AM, I am eternal Father and eternal Son, joined by the Spirit, then, now, and forever – come and be with Us." It takes faith to believe the answer and respond.

Let's end by meditating for a couple of minutes on Psalm 37:23 – 24, the image of a Father with child:

*The steps of a man are established by the Lord, and He delights in his way. When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong, because the Lord is the One who holds his hand.* Psalm 37:23 – 24 (NASB)

### **Offering/ Benediction**

Let me leave you with this final image of God as Father.

I have spent a great deal of time over the past few years trying to craft the message of Christianity in a few sentences. Here is what I have so far:

God yearns for relationship with us so that we might enjoy the fullness of being His sons and daughters. He sends His Spirit to unite us with Jesus in love. Jesus then leads us into oneness with our Father.

It is my prayer for me and for you and this church that rather than living life for God we enjoy Him by experiencing life with Him, in all its pain and joy and wonder and mystery.

So, go in peace, and be careful out there, the mission field is right outside those doors.



Forgiving Father