INTRODUCTION

After the resurrection the disciples of Jesus had to wrestle with the obvious problem of making sense of Jesus. They believed—and confessed—that he was savior and Lord, and they worshiped him as God. Little did they know that this confession would send them in a direction that would have far-reaching consequences for the movement that began on the Day of Pentecost, the day God sent the Holy Spirit. This session will explore those consequences.

Christian theology does not start with the abstract but with the concrete. The first Christian theologians were followers of Jesus. They knew him as a friend and teacher first, and as a real human being. Only AFTER the resurrection did they change their mind. Not that Jesus ceased to be human. Far from it! They never once conceded that ground, reducing him to a phantom or an angel or something of that sort. He continued to be human in their memory, as the stories in the Gospels show so obviously. But they realized he was more, too.

This introduces us to the long process of how the followers of Jesus came to think differently about God. But “think” is not the right word. Yes, they did think about God; but they also prayed to God, worshiped God and obeyed God. Their faith was lived, not simply thought. The God they believed, loved and obeyed was Triune, and the Jesus they proclaimed as Lord was both divine and human.

In this session we will explore the weighty topic of Trinity (the nature of God as Triune) and Christology (the nature of Jesus as divine and human). Don’t let it intimidate you. It is true that the greatest minds in history have written volumes on this subject. It is equally true that hundreds of millions of ordinary Christians living over the past 2000 years have understood and believed that God is one God who exists eternally in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that Jesus Christ is one person who has two natures, one divine and one human. This is the God they trusted and followed.
There is more at stake here than seems obvious. One of the necessary decisions we must make in life has to do with our view of reality. What is truly real? Is it God, or is it ultimately something else—a race or nation or gender, success and wealth and power, or simply the self. Christians believe that God DEFINES REALITY because God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is ultimate reality. More about that later.

NOTES

1. A map

2. The Disciples’ experience of Jesus

3. Who was Jesus?

4. After the Resurrection

5. Jesus as human

6. Jesus as fulfillment
7. Jesus as Lord!

8. “Revealing God by being God”


10. God coming to earth as a human being!
    a. That God did . . .
    b. As God did . . .
    c. I Corinthians 1:18-25!

11. Gregory of Nazianzus
12. Two further questions:
   a. In light of the incarnation, who is God? Trinity!

   b. In light of Jesus as God, how human was he? Christology

13. The two primary purposes:
   a. Restoration of relationship

   b. Restoration of image

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

The entire New Testament bears witness to the nature of Christ as divine and human, and the nature of God as one God in three persons. We will study a few of the passages that make that explicit. Spend the next two weeks pondering these passages and jotting down some notes. Ask two questions: what do you learn about Jesus Christ in these passages? What do you learn about God?

Philippians 2:5-11
Colossians 1:15-20
Mark 2:1-12
Luke 7:36-50
John 1:1-18
John 8:31-59
John 11:17-27

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

Christians have used the phrase—“in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”—from the very inception of the church. They have spoken it in prayer, during baptism and communion, at weddings, and in a benedictions. It states that there is one God who eternally exists as three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The exercise for this session is to use this phrase throughout the day.

There is a reason for this. Every day we are bombarded with competing claims on our lives, claims that tell us what is real, true and reliable. In the face of these claims Christians must name and speak reality. Christians confess: “I believe that God defines reality, and I know God through the revelation of God as Jesus Christ. God is one God; God is a triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” God defines reality.

Practice this for the next two weeks:

- Conclude mealtime prayers, ending with, “In the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”
- Offer a blessing over children before bedtime, ending with, “In the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”
- Pray in anticipation of the day ahead, ending with, “In the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”
• Thank God at the end of the day for the day’s blessings and opportunities, ending with, “In the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

In short, train yourself to use this language.

SPECIAL PROJECT

You can also envision the Triune God at work in the world around you. One of the secrets of Christian living is to discover that God is always at work. As we move through the day we keep trying to see and step into the work he is already doing. God works to create and sustain, God works to redeem, God works to convict and renew, God works to restore justice and show mercy. God works to draw people to himself. We must discern how God is at work and then how we can contribute to it.

At the beginning of the second week try this: in your morning prayers (however short they might be!) ask God for the eyes to see what God is already doing in the world (and in your world in particular): among the members of your family and in your friendships, at school and at work, in meetings, in recreation, in shopping, in daily chores. The Triune God is powerful. The Triune God is good. The Triune God recreates and restores. The Triune God works justice. The Triune God reveals himself. Can you see it? Ask God to give you those eyes, and then ask God for the wisdom and power to step into God’s work and join it, always “in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Session 1:

1. Begin with prayer.
2. Reflect on what you learned and how you applied the content from the last session.
3. Watch the video.
4. Key question: How can God be one God and three persons? Is this simply impossible to understand? Is that same true in the case of Jesus Christ being both divine and human? Why bother with this? Or is there something necessary about it, necessary in our understanding of God and the Christian faith?
5. What did you learn about . . .
   a. The experience of the disciples concerning Jesus?
   b. Whom they thought Jesus to be?
c. How the crucifixion affected them?
d. The resurrection?
e. What the resurrection set in motion concerning their memory of Jesus as human? Their understanding of the story of Israel? Their view of the very identity of Jesus?
f. What it meant that Jesus came “to reveal God by being God”? 
g. Why it is strange to consider not only THAT God came but HOW God came in Jesus Christ?
h. What “Trinity” means? That God is one God in three persons, that God is One in Relationship?
i. What it means that Jesus Christ is both divine and human?
j. Why God come as Jesus Christ?—“restoration of relationship” and “restoration of image.”

6. What are your own reflections on all this?
7. How might belief in a Triune God affect the way we actually live in the world?
8. Why is this hard for Christians?

Session 2:

1. Begin with prayer.
2. What did you learn from the Bible passages you studied? About Jesus? About the Triune God?
3. Share what you learned by praying “in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”
4. What does it mean to have the eyes to see God already at work? How did that affect the way you lived each day for God?
5. What are you learning so far? What kind of impact is it having on you?
6. What questions do you have?
7. How can you pray for each other?
8. Conclude with prayer.