

## Do You Know God?

Trinity Sunday – 06/12/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: John 8:48-59 Pastor Keith Besel

### **Introduction**

- ⊗ “Trinity,” “triune,” they may seem like normal words to you and me, but honestly they are strange; even foreign words to a growing number of people today.
  - ➔ More than once, I’ve had people ask me, “So, what does that word, “trigh-nigh-ty” mean?” And “is this concept really so important that it deserves a special day of its own on the church calendar? The answer, friends is a resounding yes!!
  - ➔ In fact, I will go so far as to say – based upon the Bible, that unless a person believes in the concept of the Trinity, and understands it at least in a very basic way, they cannot truly know God. And unless a person “knows” God as He truly is, a person cannot be saved.
- ⊗ So, let’s get to it. The term “trinity” or “triune” simply means “three in one”. Now that’s easy to say, but impossible to grasp in all of its details with our limited human minds. The word itself is not found in the Bible, but it has been used from the earliest Christian church to identify God as He has revealed Himself to us in Scripture – as three distinct persons in one inseparable God.
  - ➔ As we just confessed a few minutes ago in the Athanasian Creed, unless a person believes in the Trinity “faithfully and firmly, [he] cannot be saved”. In today’s “politically correct” society, that’s a bold statement to make. Yet as Jesus shows us in His confrontation with the Jews, here in our text today, it is a statement that must be made because it is the truth.
- ⊗ What we are really addressing here is the same question that Jesus and the Jews were wrestling over, “Who is God?” The Jews were certain that they knew the answer to that question. But confidence in itself doesn’t make something right. And Jesus told them in verse 55, “You have not known [God]”. This conversation on the surface reminds me a lot of two children arguing back and forth, “You don’t know the truth.” “Yes, I do.” “No you don’t.”
  - ➔ The commentator, Richard Lenski says this about the conversation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, “With ever greater clearness Jesus reveals to them both their own character and state, and Himself as the Son and Savior. He never temporizes, compromises, hesitates, or hides. He is absolutely fearless, and His victory is complete at every step” (Lenski, pg. 673).

### **I. Revealing the truth about the Jews**

- ⊗ I think we can actually use Lenski’s summary as a great outline to help us get at this text. He says that Jesus first of all reveals the truth about the Jews as to their character and their state. Their character is unbelief which means they are in the state of condemnation. What if someone said this to you, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44)? Well, those actually are Jesus’ words just before our text.
  - ➔ He just told the Jewish leaders that they are murderers and liars because they are working for their father, the devil. If you or I said that to someone today, they’d go nuts. But Jesus knew that being tactful was not going to help in winning these men over? Still their very negative answer should come as no surprise. They did just what people do so quickly today whenever they don’t like something that is said. They called Jesus names. They called Him a Samaritan in verse 48. In that day there was nothing worse than calling someone a “Samaritan” and to say that he is “demon-possessed” as they did in verse 49. It’d sort of be like if I called you a “Nazi” and an “agent of Satan.”

- ✘ But here's the distinguishing point between their words and Jesus'. Jesus was actually speaking the truth, while they just called names to try and avoid the truth. The worst though is how they dishonored Jesus because of who He truly is. Ironically their own words prove Jesus' words to be true and showed theirs to be a lie. They really are children of the devil because they refuse to recognize their own God when He is standing right there in front of them.

## II. Proclaiming the truth about Jesus.

### A. As God

- ✘ Now what about Jesus and His nature? In this text we see the very first words of John's gospel come true. John 1:1-3 affirms Jesus' Godly and eternal nature. It says, "In the beginning was the Word, and 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 any thing made that was made". That is huge! This man standing before these Jews is both their Creator and God and yet as John 1:10 continues, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him".

→ So place yourselves in the sandals of those Jews that day in our text. What are the chances that you would look at a man standing in front of you like I'm standing in front of you right now, with human flesh and bone. Would you recognize that He is the eternal God; the One who is without beginning or end; who is all-powerful, all-knowing and created the entire universe...including you? Yet that's why Jesus is condemning them, because they don't recognize; they don't "know" Him as their God. Does this seem fair?

- ✘ Well it is fair when you consider that these guys were supposed to be the experts in God's word. They had memorized every bit of Scripture, word for word. In fact they even tried to use God's word against Jesus; the one whom John 1:14 says is "The Word" made flesh. When Jesus proclaimed that, "If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste death" (v.51), they pointed back to Abraham as their father and showed they had no grasp of eternal life. "Look, Abraham died and there's no one greater than him," they argued.

→ But you see, Abraham's own actions showed that he fully believed in the resurrection from the dead. Hebrews 11 (v. 17ff) takes us back to the time when God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac. And Hebrews 11:19 tells us that Abraham "considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead".

- ✘ And then when Jesus said in verse 56 that He had seen Abraham first hand, the Jews all but lost it! I mean we are talking about a time of 2000 years earlier that Abraham walked this earth. But these guys, who are supposed to know their Scripture, apparently did not know that one of the men who visited Abraham and Sara in the desert was actually Jesus in human form here on earth. Three times in that text, it specifies that "Yahweh" spoke directly to Abraham. And the context of this section in Genesis 18, points to our understanding that this was Jesus, before He had taken on flesh, coming to Abraham and proclaiming to him and Sarah about His own future coming through the offspring of the baby they would have in their old age.

→ The most telling proclamation though is when Jesus said in verse 58, "Before Abraham was born, I am." How could Jesus say that He had actually seen Abraham? Well with these words Jesus says, "I have seen it all!" And I mean ALL! The verb tenses are crucial here. Abraham "was", meaning that he had a beginning as all of us do. But Jesus says, "I Am". Whether you're talking about before the beginning of time, or when the world was created, or at the time of Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses when God first made His name known as "I Am", or even if you're talking about the day this conversation took place with the Jews, Jesus is! He always is! He is eternal, without beginning or end, because He is God.

→ And make no mistake; these Jews knew exactly what Jesus meant this time. They knew that He was calling Himself God because He used God's personal name, "I Am". That's why they picked up the stones to try and kill Jesus, revealing again their true nature as murderers; as children of the prince of murder, the devil.

## B. As Savior

✘ Because the Jews refused to recognize Jesus for who He truly is, they rejected and eventually killed their own Savior. They claimed to believe in the God of Scripture, but as Jesus said right to their face in vs. 55, they didn't really know God because they didn't know Him. Only He could say these words, "If anyone keeps My word, He will never see death" (v. 51). Now, we don't dare overlook the significance of that short sentence, for it is the entire law and gospel all wrapped up into one. It's all-inclusive, "If anyone keeps My word".

→ Jesus opens the door there to all sinners, including you and me. For on our own, none of us can keep His word. We are just as guilty as the Jews in our text for not perfectly recognizing and following Jesus as we should. That's the law.

→ But we also rejoice in this same sentence for it is in His Word that we see Jesus go to the cross and suffer the pains of our sin. It's in His Word that Jesus promises His Spirit, who grants us the ability to recognize Jesus as our God and Savior. It's in His Word that we hear the Father proclaim us innocent, forgiven, and freed by the blood of Jesus. Yes, it's there in His Word that we rejoice as Abraham did, for it's in His Word that we too come face to face with Jesus, receiving eternal salvation and therefore "seeing His day" (v. 36) of fulfillment. To know that truth, both in your heart and in your head, is to "know" the Triune God.

## III. Contemporary Applications to "Keeping His Word"

✘ But how can we sinners "keep" Christ's word? "Keeping" Christ's word has four distinct applications as we go forward in our lives today. The first part is to make sure it is Christ's word and not someone else's that we're keeping.

→ You see, there are so many different "words"; so many different "trinities" in our world today. Once on I-25 I saw a car that had three of those "fish" symbols arranged in a manner so as not to proclaim any one of them as being more-true than the other. ("Darwin", "Alien", and "Jesus" fish.) That's how so many people think of God today – as a confused conglomeration of many contradictory belief systems; as their own made-up god, determined and defined uniquely by them. But Jesus says, we are to keep His word and no one else's.

→ The second part of "keeping" Christ's Word is to keep it in your heart as the Gospel word of faith that alone grants you the "power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16). Keeping Christ's Word this way means we are convinced that it is the only word that is perfect and without error yesterday, today and forever because it is the Word of the only God who always is God. Even when we struggle to fully grasp it, we still believe and keep Christ's Word as the truth.

→ And the third part of "keeping" Christ's Word is keeping it in obedience. This is the natural and necessary outcome of believing Christ's word. Because we believe it; because it's true and without error, now we seek to obey and keep it every day in our lives. This is where we see the work of each person in the Trinity each and every day. Jesus wins for us the power to obey. The Spirit comes, takes us by the hand, and guides, prods and empowers us to obey. And the Father, for the sake of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, forgives us when we fall short and don't obey.

→ Finally, the fourth part of “keeping” Christ’s Word is when we work each day to keep it from being tampered with, contaminated or perverted by those who can’t or will not recognize and know God as He teaches about Himself in Scripture. The assumption here is that you and I will actually read and study God’s Word so that we actually know it when we hear it.

→ Clyde Francis Lytle once said, “Unless we know the difference between flowers and weeds, we are not fit to take care of a garden. It is not enough to have truth planted in our minds. We must learn and labor to keep the ground clear of thorns and briars, follies and perversities, which have a wicked propensity to choke the word of life.” Likewise John Calvin once said, “A dog barks when his master is attacked. I would be a coward if I saw that God’s truth is attacked and yet would remain silent.”

## **Conclusion**

✘ Because we love and know our Lord as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; because we have salvation by grace through faith in Jesus as the Savior and the God of all generations; and because He has called us to “keep His Word”; then friends, let us bark when it is attacked. Let us rejoice when it is proclaimed faithfully. And let each one of us be a part of that proclamation every day of our lives. For it is there in the Word that we truly come to know our God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.