

Title: “Three in One”

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Matthew 28:16-20

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Lesson: *A recently discovered (fictitious) letter from a disciple of Jesus describes the Trinity and the commission to spread the Gospel message.*

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

This morning I would like to read a fictitious letter discovered by Biblical archeologists. The author is unknown, but it dates to around the time of Christ.

Greetings,

God's blessings and peace be upon you this day. My heart yearns to see you again and I look forward to that day, but I am writing because recent past weigh heavily on my heart. In my last letter I told you about the terrible crucifixion of Jesus, my teacher. And I told you that I constantly I reflected on those events and was troubled by my actions, or inactions. Why didn't I fight to try and save him? Why did I run with the other disciples when Jesus was arrested?

I have to tell you that since then we have seen him alive! Yes! Jesus is alive and he has come back to us. At first, I was extremely afraid for my life because I expected revenge for the part that I played in his suffering, but that is not what he offered. He offered forgiveness, instead. And not just for me, but for all of the disciples, and for all of the world - everyone!

You know that I followed him for almost three years, and I saw the miracles that he performed and heard his lessons of God. I didn't understand much of it and I still don't but some of the pieces are starting to come together for me. His focus was not on the restoration of the physical but on restoration of the soul. He went around forgiving sins! And as an outward sign of that inward healing, he healed their ailments. I always stood as close as I could to him when he did this and also when he taught. I wanted to learn everything, wanted to see everything that he did.

But my heart is troubled again. When he came back, he spoke these words to us.

18b “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them *into* the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

He's sending us to do what he did! He commands us to continue his work throughout all of the world! Me? Can you believe that? I can't do it! I don't have the knowledge to teach anyone anything! I was only with him for three years. What is he thinking? Doesn't he know that I'll

probably just mess it up? But he did say that he would be with me, so there's that. But I don't know. I just don't know exactly what he's asking of me.

I had to speak to Peter about part of it (I wanted to talk to him about all of it, but he was a bit grumpy at that moment. I think he's a bit stressed out). Anyway, Jesus said that we are to baptize people into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. I asked him what that meant, *into* and *he* asked me if we were friends. Of course, we were, I told him. And then this is what he said:

What does it mean to you that we are friends? What do you get out of it? You get the knowledge of knowing that I always have your back, right? That I'll always be there for you and give you my tunic if you ever need it. When you are hurt, you can come to me and I will do what I can to restore you back to health. When you are afraid, or upset, or happy, or anything, you can come to me and I will always make time to listen. When you need advice or a favor, I'll always be there and I'll always respond. This is what it means to be friends. Does that make sense? Now you know that I'm married and so because we are friends, you are automatically friends with my wife. You can come to her, just like you can come to me. She will be there for you in the same ways that I will be there for you. So, when you entered into this relationship with me, you entered into it with my wife as well. But here's the thing about this relationship: my wife and I are two separate people. We have been joined together by God, but we are still separate in every physical way. Sometimes we are close, but sometimes we fight and are not in communion with each other.

Now, contrast that to the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are completely one, but they are also completely three. They are joined together in every way that my wife and I are not. They have a perfect union, a perfect relationship. So, when we baptize someone in the name of the Trinity (He said that he just made that word up and I kind of like it) they enter into an intimate relationship with God. They are immersed into God and initiated into his communion. You see, this relationship is so much greater than that between you and me or even between me and my wife. Through this relationship we receive *everything* that God offers - his grace, his mercy, and his love. But, don't miss this part because it is very important. Because we are brought into a relationship that is so intimate, so close with Him, we must be perfect, but we are not. We are sinful beings. But because Jesus took our sin to the cross, he suffered the judgement that we deserved for our sins and he traded it for his reward. So, now we can commune with God because he sees us through the work of his son. In other words, we are forgiven and made perfect in God's eyes because he sees us through Jesus. Got it?

I told him that I understood all that but still didn't know how the Holy Spirit fit into all of this, so he continued:

Do you remember when we first met? You were awe struck for some reason and had to get to know me. You *wanted* to be my friend (and, personally, it was a tad bit annoying in the beginning - always asking if I needed anything, and always getting into my personal space, there was no social distancing with you). But when it comes to God, you *don't* want a relationship with him. You actually want to fight him. You are, really an enemy of his.

I interrupted him at this point because I just couldn't believe that! I told him that, sure I ran when Jesus was arrested and I didn't fight to free him, but I was never an enemy of Jesus and never an enemy of God. He said:

I have a feeling that I'm going to read this sometime in the future but "once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your mind because of your evil behavior. (Col 1:21)" You see, you cannot, by your own strength or will do anything *but* rebel against God, so during your baptism, he sends the Holy Spirit into your heart to take refuge, to give you the faith to believe in the forgiveness of your sins, and to recognize the relationship that you have been placed into with the Holy Trinity. You see, it is *because* of the Holy Spirit that you even *want* a relationship with God!

I wanted to ask him more, but I could tell that he was getting annoyed and wanted to get back to whatever he was doing so I ended it there.

You see, dear friend, maybe I *can* do this "go and make disciples" thing, after all. I have Jesus with me, an intimate relationship with the Triune God, and the Holy Spirit working within me. What else do I need? I think I am ready to go out into the world and tell others about Jesus. I guess the intent of this letter has changed. Instead of information, I'm sending an invitation to you: Will you join me on this mission? Will you pray about it with me?

The letter ends with a prayer. Will you join me in prayer as I read it?

Jesus, you once told us that "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. (Luke 10:2-3)" I didn't know exactly what this meant after you were crucified and returned to us. I now understand what you want from me and I thank you for sending the Holy Spirit into my heart so that I can proclaim this news to every person I meet. In your name we pray. Amen.