

**Jesus Himself
The Father Himself
The Spirit Himself**

David W. Gooding

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Scripture quotations are mainly from the Revised Version, but sometimes Dr Gooding gives his own translations or paraphrases.

This text has been edited from a transcript of a meditation given by David Gooding to friends in Ashford, Co. Wicklow, Ireland, September 2009.

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The Myrtlefield Trust

PO Box 2216

Belfast, N Ireland

BT1 9YR

w: www.myrtlefieldhouse.com

e: info@myrtlefieldhouse.com

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Jesus himself drew near and went with them (Luke 24:15).

The Father himself loves you (John 16:27).

The Spirit himself makes intercession for us (Romans 8:26).

Jesus himself—Luke 24:15

Things hadn't turned out as the two on the way to Emmaus expected, and to be frank they were sorely dissatisfied with Jesus. When the stranger joined them they told him why they were so disappointed. They had thought Jesus was the one that should 'deliver'¹ Israel (from the Romans), and he just didn't do it.

They said that certain women had been at his grave and had seen angels who said that he was alive. They thought that that was completely irrelevant, because if he had been who he said he was it wouldn't have happened to start with. So all this talk of his resurrection was beside the point. A messiah who couldn't stop himself being arrested and crucified, how could he be the Messiah? So they were sorely disappointed with the Lord; but in answer to their problems our Lord came—'Jesus himself drew near'.

Yes, he went on to expound the holy Scriptures, but it interests me very much from a practical point of view that, for believers whose minds are troubled and disappointed, the first answer was that 'Jesus himself drew near'. In my little experience I have known times when I have faced so-called evidence in the academic world that, if it had been true, would have destroyed my faith. And in times when I couldn't think of what the answers were, it was a great comfort to me that Christ knows anyway and he is responsible for my faith. That is what he meant when he said, 'I have given them thy word . . . and they have believed that you have sent me . . . Father, keep them' (John 17:8, 11). He has provoked our faith, and he is concerned to maintain it. So that I have learned in those circumstances to commit it to the Lord in the confidence that Jesus knows—though it might have been quite a long while before I saw the answers.

Then it says that he had this long discussion with them and pointed out what their fallacy was. They had read the Old Testament; but they had read it selectively, choosing the bits that they liked and passing over the bits that they didn't like. And so he argued with them that, 'thus it is written, that the Messiah . . .' Notice that he didn't say 'I', but 'the

¹ Note: 'deliver', not 'redeem' Israel (an unfortunate translation in this context).

Messiah'—whoever the Messiah is. 'Isn't it true that Scripture says that the Messiah must suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' (see Luke 24:26). So he expounded to them the Scriptures. He had an answer to their particular problem.

But their eyes were 'holden' (v. 16 KJV), that they should not see him and recognise him. When they got home he made as if he would go on but they said, 'the day is now far spent, why don't you come in with us?' (v. 29). So he came in, and he was 'known to them' (v. 35). How, and by what means, did they know that it was really he? It was when he took the bread and broke it and blessed it. Luke is very interesting—in his resurrection stories he gives us some of the evidence by which the early apostles knew that this was Jesus, and not some imposter. How did they know that this figure was really the Christ? (And how do we know?) He was known to them in the breaking of bread. We don't know who the two on the road to Emmaus were, whether they were in the room where the Lord had taken bread and said, 'this is my body, which is given for you' (22:19). If one of them at least was an apostle, then this breaking of bread would remind him of it. But, even so, as he broke the bread, they would have seen his wounded wrists.

Ultimately it comes down to whom we are going to trust. Our risen Lord will make himself known. He will do it in stages. At first they didn't know it was the Lord. He had concern for their faith, and the maintenance of it. He referred them to Scripture as a solid ground for what he was saying. But how did they know that it was not mere theological talk? He was made known to them in the breaking of bread; they saw the wounds in his hands. The other stories of the resurrection in Luke are similarly recognition stories: how did they know that this Jesus who came and talked to them was really Christ, the Son of God?

How do I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he is concerned for me? Amid all the academic questions, and the questions that life throws at us, it remains our anchor-hold on reality: 'the Son of God . . . loved me, and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20). In our difficulties and quandaries and disappointments, 'Jesus himself' will draw near.

The Father himself—John 16:27

'If you shall ask anything in my name,' said he, 'the Father will give it you' (v. 23). 'I am not meaning to imply that I have to persuade the Father to love you. No, the Father himself loves you!' Sometimes we get the wrong idea that the Father is angry, and then his Son comes along and pleads with him to be kind to us. That is not true! God is of course angry against sin, but when it comes to his people 'the Father himself loves you' (v 27). Christ does not have to plead with him to love us. 'He loves you,' says Christ, 'because you have believed that I came out from God, and that I am going back to God' (John 13:3). Christ is God's gift to us, and Christ is the expression of the Father. If Christ loves us, so does the Father. That is what Christ is saying: 'the Father himself loves you!'

I have a bit of an interest in astronomy and have been reading Isaiah in recent times. It is very powerful stuff. Who is this God that holds the waters in his hands (Isa 40:12)—the Pacific, the Atlantic, the North Sea, the Indian Ocean and whatever other oceans there are? He is the God of this universe, and he loves me! We don't have to plead with the Lord to be

with us. He has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you (Heb 13:5). That's his promise, and he will never let you down. 'The Father himself loves you.'

The Spirit himself—Romans 8:26

Then there is the third person of the Trinity, 'the Spirit himself'.² That's all three persons of the Trinity engaged for us of their own initiative. 'The Spirit himself makes intercession for us' (Rom 8:26). 'Those he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified' (v. 30). That is the programme.

Verse 28 should not be translated, 'according to *his* purpose' but 'according to purpose'—deliberately called. The difference is this: you happen to be in town one day and you come across your long-lost aunt from America. You are surprised to see her, and she says she had won a ticket and decided to come unannounced. Of course you feel obliged to ask her for a meal, and you then explain that she will find your house very unprepared as you have the builders in. Then you say that if you had known she was coming you would have made provision for it. That is a very different situation from inviting someone you had intended to invite, and not having made provision for them. On normal occasions you would invite her to come, and because it was a deliberate invitation ample provision has been made.

God has called us 'according to purpose'—he deliberately called us. He has made the provision. He doesn't sit around and say, 'Goodness me, these folks have just trusted the Lord, what on earth shall I do with them?' He has invited us and he has a whole programme worked out for us.

So what shall I pray for next in my life's experience? What would be best so that the purpose of God should go on and be developed in my life? Should I pray for seasons of blessing and rapture and all things wonderful? Or should I tell the Lord that I need a bit of discipline with my sarcasm or bad temper or whatever? How do we know? Well, in actual fact, says Scripture, 'we don't know how to pray as we ought' (v. 26). We don't know what would advance the Lord's purpose in our lives. But thank God we are not left to worry about it. The Holy Spirit has been put in our hearts and he does the interceding—'the Spirit himself makes intercession for us' (v. 26). And he who searches our hearts is able to distinguish between our very well meant but misguided requests and the deeper thing that rises in our hearts because the Holy Spirit himself is making intercession for us.

What a tremendous blessing that is to me in finding my way along the Christian pathway—in progress, we hope. If I were responsible for it I might very easily get lost down this side road or the other. Whereas God has foreseen the need, and the Holy Spirit within me makes intercession. God can distinguish between my well meant but maybe sometimes erratic and misguided requests, and the intercessions of the Holy Spirit. Because he intercedes, says holy Scripture, 'according to God' (v. 27), God listens to him, and the Holy Spirit is responsible for bringing us home.

² In the Authorised Version it says 'itself', which is unfortunate. The word for 'Spirit' is neuter in Greek so it has to be a neuter pronoun. But of course the Holy Spirit is a person and the verse should be translated, 'the Spirit himself intercedes for us'.

Abraham's servant went down to seek a bride for Isaac, as they did in those days. When the question was put to the girl in front of her family, 'Will you go with this man?'³ she said, 'Yes, I will go' (Gen 24:58). So they had the journey to take, but the man didn't say, 'Well now, my dear, this is my master's visiting card, and this is our address. If you are ever in those distant parts, it may be in your interest to call and make contact! My master is very wealthy; he loves his son and has given everything to him. You might find it a very interesting thing if you heed my suggestion and make your way there. Do knock on the door!' Of course not! The girl says 'Yes,' and he is ready—camels and all—to take her safely home to his master's son.

We are not machines, when all is said and done. It has to be our desire—we want to please the Lord. But then God has placed his Holy Spirit in our hearts for that divine cooperation in us. God will not be content until he has us conformed to the image of his Son, and to that end 'the Spirit himself intercedes for us'.

This simple meditation has meant a lot to me in recent days. Jesus himself; the Father himself; the Spirit himself—the Trinity determined to have me in glory, conformed to the image of God's own Son. That is marvellous—something to lie back on in our troubled times.

³ Abraham's servant.

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. His international teaching ministry is marked by fresh and careful expositions of both testaments. He has published scholarly studies on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John 13–17, Acts, Hebrews and the New Testament's use of the Old Testament.