

1 Timothy 3:14-16

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- [0 : 00] We come now to our evening service and then we can read again from 1st Timothy in chapter 3 from verse 14 to the end.
- I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.
- Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness. He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up to glory.
- Very interesting passage. It tells us an awful lot about Paul himself, about how he viewed things. He's coming near the end of his life, near the end of his ministry at this stage.
- But he has been thinking things through. He's giving encouragement to Timothy and Titus. He's giving encouragement to people who need to be helped and strengthened to continue the work.
- [1 : 18] And in this particular chapter in 1st Timothy, he's pointing out how important it is that we should have the right office bearers, the right people in leadership.
- I mean, that's very important. So he deals with that in verses 1 to 7 to do with elders, overseers, he calls them. And then in verses 8 to 13 to do with deacons and deacons' wives.
- Very important who our office bearers are. Because they have to manage things well. They have to manage, as it were, the household children well.
- They have to respect and be respected. Such a person who's a novice bearer, of course, couldn't just be a novice.
- They can't just be plucked out. They've got to have a track record. Otherwise, the devil himself, as it were, will bring them into his snare.
- [2 : 20] They must be thought well of by outsiders, as well as by those who hold to the truth. They must be very careful in the way they live and gain a good standing, as it were, among the community among whom they serve.
- So whether they're overseers, i.e. elders, or deacons, they have to be very careful how they live. And the church that appoints these people to office have to know that they are the right office bearers.
- But the reason why they have to be the right office bearers, of course, is because they have a right church to look after.
- And that's, of course, what he describes in verse 14 there. Now, the Spirit expressly says, sorry, in verse 14, See, two things briefly about that.
- The church. The church is very important, you see. It's got to have the right character in the sense that it must remember what the church actually is.
- [3 : 48] It's the living God's church. It's not man's church. It's not the office bearers' church. It's not the minister's church. It's not the longest standing serving member's church.

This is the living God's church. Not just God's church, but the living God's church. The church of the living God. Which is quite a statement.

This is not talking about God as somebody who started things up and then disappeared, is no longer interested. No, no. He's living. He's very active.

And he's very active in the world through the church. This is the living God's church. So, of course, you've got to have the right kind of office bearers who are leading on earth, as it were, the church of the living God.

But then the second thing is, the church, what does it do? In terms of character, it's the pillar and foundation, the pillar and buttress of the truth.

[4 : 54] In other words, it exists to promote the truth, to defend the truth, and to support the truth. That's what the church is organized to do.

That's what the leaders should lead it to do. They should be concerned about truth. That's why they always want to teach all the members, all those who are professing Christians, they want to disciple them into the truth, as it is in Christ Jesus.

They want to bring them to grow in their knowledge and understanding. They need to grow in their faith. So they want to promote that truth among the Lord's people whom they lead.

But they also want to defend that truth. Sometimes that defense will be among the Lord's people because they can get things wrong. Other times, and more often, it's defending the truth over and against the community outside the church.

And as you know yourselves, in every generation, truth, biblical truth, is attacked. There is no generation where truth gets off, as it were, scot-free from that point of view.

[6 : 10] It is all this under attack. And therefore, the church should be trained to defend the truth. That's one of the reasons why we have theological colleges.

That's why we run Saturday courses. That's why we have mentorship leaders in congregations. That's why we want to disciple people in the faith. That's why we want to seek, as far as possible, to train perhaps Sunday school teachers.

We want to ensure that parents know how to defend the truth. So that they're able to give corrective education, for example, to those whom they are raising for the Lord.

Defending the truth is really, really important. And we should, as office bearers and as leaders and as congregations, ensure that the truth is promoted, proclaimed, but also that the truth is being defended.

So you'll look and see how it is being undermined in society or even in the main churches. See how it is being undermined and then begin to correct.

[7 : 21] And then also to support the buttress of the truth. You're there, as it were, the pillar, not holding the truth up high only, but doing everything possible so that truth is actually supported, strengthened in the Lord's people, in the leaders and in every situation, I suppose.

So the church, it's the church, it's the living God's church, and it's the pillar and buttress of the truth. You need the right of the spirit because you want that right kind of church.

But then we've talked about the truth, and that brings us on to the main focus of this sermon, really. And that is, what is the truth? He's mentioned the pillar and buttress of the truth.

That's what the church is. Well, what is the truth? And that's what he then says, great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness. He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Truth. Truth. It's not just any truth. The church can't choose the truth that it promotes, defends and supports.

[8 : 46] They can't do that. We don't go by the fashions of the world. We don't go by what's okay for them in this particular generation.

Our truth is focused on the gospel. And this gospel is focused on our passion. And this passion is Jesus Christ.

And this passion, Jesus Christ, is to be the one that fills our hearts and our minds. And that's why he says here, great indeed is the mystery of godliness, we confess.

Great indeed. Mega. There's nothing small, nothing minimal about this at all. It's this truth that has to be seen as great by us.

And I do hope that us, those who are confessing the Lord or thinking of following the Lord, I do hope that you really take that on board.

[9 : 49] That there's something great about the truth you confess and profess. Something great about it. It's not minimal. It's not minor. It's not secondary.

It's not something you bring out and polish from time to time like an heirloom. This is so great that it cannot possibly be hidden. This is what's most true about the church.

This is what's most true and at the centre of the life of office bearers. But it's also what's key to every single Christian and what they are doing here on earth.

Great, indeed we confess, is the mystery of godliness. Godliness. This is what fills the heart and mind.

Godliness here is almost close to a word describing religion. Something that takes us over. Something that we are there for. Something that describes the kind of community that we are among.

[10 : 54] Let's see what Paul says about this godliness that has been revealed. It was hidden but it's now been revealed.

There's something that's been true but not always known. But now it's been known. And this kind of mystery word, it doesn't just talk about something once hidden, now made known.

It's a kind of thing that was once hidden, now made known and is to do with end times. It's to do with the way the world is and where the world is heading.

Okay. And it's very important to have an understanding not only of what's true but what is central truth, i.e. Jesus Christ and the gospel at the heart of God's purposes.

And where that is heading towards the end times, eschatology. Everything is heading towards this great goal. If you understand the mystery of godliness, you're ready to live life now and life in the days to come and life in the life to come.

[12 : 12] And I think that's where Paul himself is. So let's look very briefly at the six things he says here about this mystery that we profess, this truth, this gospel, this Jesus.

First of all, he was manifested in the flesh. See, it's not just that God became man. But God became man to show himself, to reveal himself, to manifest things about himself.

There are some things that angels could maybe explain about God. There may be some things that prophets could explain. But there are some things about God that cannot be known unless Jesus himself comes and reveals these things to us.

That's why at the end of, or coming near the end of Jesus' ministry, he could stand in front of the apostles and say, He who has seen me has seen the Father.

That's why John could say in John 1.14, We have seen his glory, glorious of the one and only from the Father, full of grace and truth. You see, you see God when you see him, because he is God manifesting himself.

[13 : 33] There were things that could not be revealed unless he came in person to reveal them to us. And just think of the commitment of God towards his people in this, that he wants to reveal himself to us.

And the incarnation happens to make sure that we can understand that revelation. Now, isn't it strange?

You might think that flesh somehow can hide the truth about God. And when Jesus becomes flesh, that is, Godness would be hidden.

Quite the reverse. Quite the reverse. The reality is, man was made in the image of God. We are so like God.

But when God comes to manifest himself in the flesh, which is made for the image of God, then beautiful revelation takes place.

[14 : 37] And that's just exactly what Jesus is. He's God manifested in the flesh. We don't discount the incarnation. We don't go straight as it were to God as spirit.

We focus very much on history. We focus on the gospel narratives. We see how Jesus revealed God there in amazing dignity and love and compassion and mercy.

He's full of grace and truth. So that's the first thing about this truth. It's God manifested in the flesh. Second thing about the truth, about the gospel and about Jesus.

He was vindicated by the spirit. Vindicated. Literally, the word is justified. He was justified by the spirit. Declared just.

Now, that's the kind of language that we normally reserve for salvation. So we talk about somebody who's a sinner. Then they come to believe in Jesus.

[15 : 44] And Jesus is the one who has died for their sins. And then they are given the righteousness of Jesus. And they, in that moment, when they believe in Jesus, they are declared righteous by God.

They are declared just by God. God views them as righteous as he views his own son. And that's beautiful. That's absolutely brilliant.

We are justified. We are declared right. Here, though, Jesus is declared right by the spirit. He is vindicated by the spirit.

What does that mean? Well, I think that this is what it means. There may be a time when you may have heard of Jesus. You may have heard others speak of him.

But he didn't seem right for you. He didn't seem important to you. He didn't seem to stand out for you. He didn't seem to be suitable or appropriate or central in any way.

[16 : 55] And then the Holy Spirit does something wonderful in your life. Maybe through the preaching of the word. Or you're reading it. Or you're hearing the testimony of God's people. And you're listening to all of this.

And Christ is being spoken of. Jesus is being declared. And the gospel is being preached. Through it all, it's as if you begin to have a camera lens.

And something comes into focus. And the focus comes to be on Jesus Christ. And you say, perfect. Absolutely perfect.

I couldn't change him. I couldn't make him better. He is vindicated by the spirit. He is declared to be gloriously right in your eyes.

By the spirit of God. It's as if the spirit says, here is Jesus. Is he not perfect for you? Right for you? Just for you?

[17 : 59] Isn't he precisely the kind of saviour that you need? I mean, when Jesus was baptised, the spirit came upon him. It's totally committed to equipping him to live that perfect life and to bring the kingdom of God.

When Jesus rose from his dead, we're told in Romans 1 verse 4 that the spirit is the one who is with him through the resurrection, bringing him to life.

The spirit is then poured upon the church by Jesus Christ from heaven after he has ascended. And the spirit is the one who is equipping the church to go out to all the nations, preaching the gospel.

And what happens? He, he vindicates Jesus in the minds, in the hearts, in the eyes, in the wills of people.

Isn't that brilliant? You might even be able to say that the spirit lives to do that. He's committed to doing that.

[19 : 13] If the church is the buttress of the truth, the pillar and ground of the truth, the spirit, he sees his role as vindicating Christ.

He's beautifully at work, marvelously at work. How do you think you became a Christian? It's because the spirit did that work within you. He vindicated Christ in your heart and mind.

And if you're seeking him just now, believe me, the spirit can vindicate Christ in your eyes too, so that you will see him in perfect focus.

And as I said this morning, less could not satisfy, more could not be desired. So that's the second thing about Jesus.

He is vindicated by the spirit. The third thing, he was seen by angels. Now, it's always been the case, isn't it, that when you think of angels, you tend to think of heaven.

[20 : 20] And then occasionally, they're here on earth. Jesus, of course, was seen by angels.

Before he came to earth, God the Son was seen by angels. They may have well veiled their faces, as in Isaiah 6, but they were aware of him, of the Lord, of God the Son.

They viewed him there. But then he came into this world. And isn't it remarkable? They didn't stop looking for him.

They didn't stop looking at him. When he came into the world, conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and then born on earth, I think all the angels in heaven came to sing in his honour and his arrival into this world.

He was seen by angels. They couldn't keep their eyes off him. Likewise, when he goes into the time of temptation in the wilderness, the angels come and feed him at the end of that phase of temptation.

[21 : 41] Angels are ministering to him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Angels are there on the morning of his resurrection. Angels are there watching him ascend into heaven.

And as soon as he ascends, arrives, they say to the disciples who are gazing into heaven, Why are you gazing? This Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come again.

How do they know he has arrived? Because they were there to see. He is seen by angels. The angels cannot keep their eyes off him.

They're mesmerised. They're taken up with him. They are his servants. They're ministering to his people. They're involved in ways that we possibly can't understand in the work of salvation.

But they always look to him. He is seen by angels, both before the incarnation and then after it. That's how great he is.

[22 : 53] He's God manifest in the flesh. He is vindicated by the Spirit. He's committed to that ministry. And he is always, always, always seen by angels.

The fourth thing is he was preached among the nations. Preached among the nations. Proclaimed. I mean, Paul, who wrote this, devoted pretty much the whole of his ministry as a Christian to preaching Christ among the nations.

The whole of his life. I don't think there was a day off for Paul. I don't think he took holidays. I don't think he just kind of had a break from all of this.

I think he lived for Christ. For me to live as Christ. For him to live as Christ. To proclaim Christ.

To preach Christ. To share Christ. And it's not something that he would find natural at all to take a break from. And I think that's true for all the Lord's servants as well.

[24 : 06] We may take a break to be refreshed. But our eyes. Our minds. Our hearts. Our plans.

Are still taken up with. How can I preach Christ? You won't find, I don't think, a true minister of the gospel. Who just takes a total break.

And says. Right, I'm going now to devote myself to sin. And not to Christ. On my fortnight. I don't know. Our mind is taken up with Christ.

How he can be proclaimed. Well, Paul. He tells us in Romans 15. He proclaimed Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum.

All the way to the Dalmatian Sea. He. In other words. This was far. Far away. This was Paul going outside of his normal zones.

[25 : 04] This was Paul going to places where he tells us in Romans 15. Virgin territory. Christ hadn't been proclaimed there before.

He hadn't been named. He wasn't a known person. A known entity. A known truth. It's as if he went to the Areopicas. And then went ten times further than that.

Out in. Towards Dalmatia. And all he wanted to do. Was proclaim it. He. He. He. He didn't say.

Well. I wonder who I'll preach about today. I wonder who I'll proclaim. No, no. He always proclaimed him. In all the nations.

In all the nations. This wasn't just something that was of relevance. Relevance to the Jews only. Yes. To the Jews first. But to the Gentiles also.

[26 : 01] And Paul's delight is to actually. Go out with the gospel. Into these virgin territories. So that he can offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

So that he can have these Gentiles. Hearing the gospel. Coming to be Christians. And then offering thanksgiving to God. That would thrill Paul.

And he proclaimed Christ. Among the Gentiles. Now. Paul couldn't convert anyone. Couldn't convert anyone. Nevertheless.

He was one of those beautiful feet. Who went out. To preach the gospel. And then when people would hear the gospel. That was proclaimed. That was proclaimed.

With faith. With faith. Then they could become Christians. He knew his part. He had to proclaim the gospel. He had to proclaim Jesus.

[26 : 59] And he had to do it. Irrespective of geographical. Territory. Or culture. He would just proclaim Christ.

He couldn't convert. It was up to the spirit. To vindicate that Christ. In the eyes of the people. But he preached Christ.

Among the nations. I hope you and I. Would also see. The greatness of Christ. The relevance of Christ. In whichever area.

God has assigned us. To serve him. We may be going into. Virgin territories. We may be going into. The housing schemes. We may be going into.

Alias where Christ. Just is not a named name. Or we may be raising. Our children for the Lord. Or we may be. Seeking to reach to our.

[27 : 56] Colleagues at work. Or wherever. We're seeking to proclaim him. Speak about him. Why should Christ. Ever be. A stranger.

In our conversations. Why we would speak about. A hundred other things. And fail to find a place for him. He shouldn't be an epilogue.

He shouldn't be the last minute. Of our day. He should be at the heart. Of what we do. Because he's so great.

Great is the mystery of godliness. He is preached among the nations. And then you come fifthly. He was believed on in the world. See.

Proclaiming him among the nations. And the nations. Are different entities. Different geographical areas. With different national peoples.

[28 : 53] And different tribes. Different languages. And so on. Yes. He must be proclaimed in all of these. But he's so great. That he's actually believed on.

In these places. He's believed on. In these various nations. Led by the spirit. People come to believe.

In the message. That they have heard. They've never seen him. They weren't in Jerusalem. They weren't in Galilee. They never set eyes.

Have you ever seen him face to face? Of course you haven't. You haven't heard him. Audibly speaking. As the disciples did on earth. You weren't there.

At the cross. Where they crucified the Lord. You weren't there. At the empty tomb. You weren't there. To watch him slowly. In his final ascension to heaven.

[29 : 51] You weren't there. For any of that. And yet. Here you are. Believing. On him. Why?

When you've never seen him. But the reality is. It makes perfect sense for you. To believe on him. You've never seen him.

You've never heard him. And yet. You know he is exactly. What scripture declares him to be.

And what the church has proclaimed him to be. It's beautiful. It's beautiful. To see somebody. In the world. Become a Christian.

Believed on. In the world. That's how great he is. That people in all the nations. Believe on him.

[30 : 48] He's believed on. In the world. In the world. As a home. Not just a tiny. Little territory.

What dignity. This person has. Nobody else. Is believed on. In the world. In the way he is.

Because no other name. Is proclaimed. As his is. And then finally. He's taken up. In glory. He's so great.

That he is God. Manifest in the flesh. He's vindicated. By the spirit. He's seen by angels. They can't keep their eyes on him. He's so great. He's proclaimed.

Among the nations. By people. Who devote their lives. To that. He's so great. That he's believed on. In the world. And he's also. So great.

[31 : 46] That he was taken up. Into glory. He couldn't be kept out. Of the father's presence. Do you remember when.

In acts one. We talked about. Jesus's final ascension there. There's Jesus speaking. And he gives. His last sentence.

On earth. And when he had finished speaking. What happened. He was taken up. Into heaven. Taken up.

From below. And a cloud. Received him. From their side. And. See that's the thing. It's not that Jesus.

Ascended. Up to heaven. It's that he was taken. Into heaven. Somebody wanted him there. Somebody thought so highly of him.

[32 : 44] That they actually wanted him there. More than that. They came to meet him. As he ascended. They took him. In the cloud. And you know. That the father.

That the father. Who revealed himself. To Jesus. On the Mount of Transfiguration. Wrapped himself. Around him. In the cloud. Spoke. Within the cloud.

And said. This. Is my beloved son here. He's the one. Who receives Jesus. He's raised. As. As Paul puts it.

In Romans 6. He's raised. By the glory. Of the father. That's resurrection. But it doesn't stop. With resurrection. He's raised.

By the glory. Of the father. Into God's presence. Into the father's presence. And when he raises him. And lifts him.

[33 : 40] And exalts him. He puts him. On the throne. Of the universe. Wow. He must think highly. Of Jesus. To put.

The son of Mary. To put. God the son. One person. Two natures. On the throne. Of the universe.

Boy. He must think. So highly. Of him. And he does. He's honored. By the father. He is highly. Exalted. By the father.

He's great. In the eyes. Of the father. He's. He loves him. He appreciates him. He adores him. He is impressed.

With him. Well you see. In all of these ways. Then. He's God. Manifest. In the flesh.

[34 : 37] Vindicated. By the spirit. Seen. By angels. Preached. Among the nations. Believed. And in the world. Taken. Up in glory. You realize here. That this mystery.

Of godliness. Our religion. Is centered. On a person. Who deliberately. Revealed himself. And we see him. To be God. Someone.

Whom the spirit. Pointed out. Whom angels. Adore. Whom nations. Have heard of. Whom the world. Believes in. And whom the father.

As it were. Cannot. Exalt. Highly. Enough. That's. The gospel.

That's. The Christ. That's. The truth. He. Is at the very. Center. Of the gospel. Of the truth.

[35 : 33] Of the grace. Of God. He. Is. Christianity. And. It's so. Important. That we have the right. Office bearers. Who appreciate that.

It's important. That we have the right. Church. That is. Seen as the living. God's church. To promote. Defend. And support. This truth. Because it is.

Mega. It's. Great. Never. Think of it. As a low thing. At all. I do. Trust that. All of you. Are the Lord's people.

Would come to appreciate. That more. And if there are. Any who are. Even. Having the. The smallest. Stirrings. Of the spirit.

Through all of this. That. That you will come. To see him. As. Just right. Just perfect. Ask God. To open your eyes.

[36 : 28] To see. Wonderful things. In Christ. Amen. Let's pray. Our heavenly father. We. Are so thankful.

For the work. That you do. In and through your church. Bringing. Christ. To be known. Through the nations. Thank you. Lord. For bringing.

Truth. To be revealed. For giving. The spirit. To laser. Point. That truth. Into the lives. Of people. Thank you.

Lord. For bringing. The church. To be so. Committed. To the truth. That it has been. Shared. Throughout. The world. And people. Becoming.

Christians. Thank you. Lord. For 2,000 years. Of gospel ministry. By people. Who believe. That great. Indeed.

[37 : 20] Is the mystery. Of godliness. Which we confess. And Lord. Help us. In our own generation. To declare this. And in the generations.

To come. Will you raise people. Now Lord. Who will be ready. To proclaim him. To a generation. Yet unborn. Hear us Lord.

For we ask it. In the name of Jesus. Amen.