

1 Timothy 3: 16; “Justified in the Spirit”, Sermon # 46 in the series – “To Honor God in the Church”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 15th, 2013, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

Last week I laid before you the proposition that the mystery of godliness is bound up in Christ Himself. His Incarnation and all the train of events which proved Him to be the Son of God and our Savior and Lord, are the basis of all true godliness in His Church. Christ led His Church in triumph, by means of His life and death and resurrection, to understand the true path to eternal life. His life tells us much about our life as Christians; our pilgrimage in godliness. It is a matter of praise that Christ has gone before us, because we can never be godly without Christ; without His grace and truth at work in our hearts. His life tells us much about our mission during our stay here upon the earth. Our mission is to proclaim Christ and His triumphal passage through this world, as the basis of our eternal salvation. Through His grace, His triumph will become the triumph of His Church in living to His glory. His triumph will become our triumph over all the forces of darkness and error in this world. This is the mystery of godliness. Last week we looked at Christ’s triumphal passage from heaven to earth. We looked at the mystery of the Trinity and the mystery of Christ’s Person. We saw that it was entirely necessary for our salvation that He be manifested in the flesh. The 2nd Person of the Godhead taking to Himself a true human nature whereby He could identify fully with fallen humanity in all its weakness and inability to please God, so that He by being sinless and righteous, could obey and fulfill God’s Holy Law, and take upon Himself the sins of the world; the sins of those people who would believe in Him for eternal life.

Now, this afternoon we want to think together about the phrase, “God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit”. What do these words, “justified in the Spirit” mean? If we have been born again I think that we should easily be able to understand “the Spirit” here, as being the Holy Spirit of God. The Lord Jesus Christ, when He came to earth, He appeared in all the infirmity and frailty of mortal flesh. He was poor, and despised, and persecuted, and finally He was put to death as a blasphemer; yet He professed and maintained a high claim; the highest possible claim, even that of being the Messiah, the Son of God. In making this claim He was largely despised and rejected of men. But even though He was treated so badly by the rulers of Israel, and also by many of His own people who should have received Him, He was vindicated in the Holy Spirit of God’s being with Him at every point of His earthly sojourn. (The word “justified” in our text is translated, “vindicated” in the NASB and the ESV translations and I believe rightfully so.) Let me give you the 3 evident times that the Holy Spirit vindicated the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1st – The Holy Spirit was the One who vindicated the Lord Jesus at the time of His Incarnation. 2nd – He vindicated our Lord at the time of His baptism. 3rd – He vindicated our Lord at the time of His resurrection.

1st – The Holy Spirit was the One who vindicated the Lord Jesus at the time of His Incarnation.

Turn with me over to Matthew 1: 19. “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.” “Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.” “But while he thought about these things, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.’” Here we can see very clearly that it took the Holy Spirit’s vindication of Jesus to overcome this man Joseph’s sense of what was right, in the right way; in order to convince him that his wife-to-be Mary had done nothing wrong. Joseph was a righteous man; he was a careful and thoughtful man, who had thought about these things. He knew that he had been sexually faithful to Mary, and he had not had relations with her; and yet here Mary was found to be with child. He did not know that God

was the Father of this child. He did not understand that Mary was still a virgin. The Holy Spirit was going to vindicate both Mary and the Lord Jesus in this situation. He was going to speak to Joseph, not with an audible voice, but by an angel appearing to him in a dream; telling him not to be afraid. Why? Because that which would be conceived in Mary was of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is fully God and just as much a Divine Person as the Father and the Son. And in this very unusual situation, He would vindicate Jesus' being formed there in Mary's womb. This was not an illegitimate child; this was the Son of God. "This is My work," the Holy Spirit was saying to Joseph; "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife". The ministry of the blessed Holy Spirit is a great part of what is termed, "The mystery of godliness", here in this verse. His work is not seen or understood by men, unless He reveals it to them, but Jesus is always vindicated. Unless He comes with illuminated grace, people will never understand. But Joseph understood. And so I must ask you now whether you understand? Do you understand that the Holy Spirit worked in this most powerful and holy way in the womb of Mary to join together the nature of God with the nature of man in the Lord Jesus? Do you believe in the virgin birth? In revealing these things to Joseph Jesus was being vindicated in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit did these things in order that God's righteousness and His mercy would be justified, and vindicated, in His loving a world of fallen sinners in this way.

Turn with me over to the gospel of Luke, Chapter 1. Here we find that Mary has a question. An angel has come to her, we read in verse 30 and he says to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus." Then in verse 34 she responds, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" "And the angel answered and said to her in verse 35 - "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." So we see that here, once again, that an angel is being used by God to communicate to Mary that the Holy Spirit will do this great and mysterious work in her womb. And you and I should understand that the Lord Jesus' need to come into the world in this one-of-a-kind unusual way was being justified, it was being vindicated, by the Holy Spirit Himself; by His using the angel to communicate this message. Jesus' being perfectly formed in the womb of Mary was a vindicating work in the sight of all men, if they have the faith to believe that they needed it. Do you, my friends, believe in the virgin birth? O what a blessed truth this is that Jesus was born of a virgin; that Jesus was not a sinner, and that perfect purity and holiness personified were about to enter the world. Only those to whom this is revealed would ever understand why this was so very necessary. Let me ask you, are you one of them?

Turn over with me to Luke, Chapter 2, verse 25-31. "And behold there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him." "And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." "So he came by the Spirit into the temple." "And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord now You are letting your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of peoples." This is what it means for the Lord Jesus to be justified in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit attests the whole purpose for our Lord's coming into the world by revealing it to this dear man Simeon who was a just and devout man who was waiting for the Consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him; the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would not die until He had seen the Lord's Christ. When he came into the temple, he came by the leading of the Spirit. When he saw Joseph and Mary bring Jesus in, he walked right over to them, and he took Jesus up in his arms and blessed God that God had fulfilled his personal promise to him, that he would see the Lord's Christ before he died. But when He spoke of Jesus, he spoke by the Spirit and He said, "My eyes have seen Your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples." The Lord Jesus coming into the world to save sinners is the gospel. God was now

manifest in the flesh, and there He was in Simeon's arms, being vindicated by the Spirit. Let us ask ourselves whether a work of the Holy Spirit has taken place in our heart? Has the Lord Jesus been formed in your heart? Has the Holy Spirit come to dwell there in your heart? Have you taken Jesus into your spiritual arms, the arms of your heart so that you know Him to be your Savior and Lord? If so, then Jesus has been vindicated, His whole mission has been justified, in the sight of God, in accordance with His eternal purpose.

Now 2ndly – The Holy Spirit also vindicated our Lord at the time of His baptism.

Turn with me over to Matthew 3, verse 13. "Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him." "And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?'" "But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.'" "Then he allowed Him." "When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him." "And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" This is the inauguration of Jesus' earthly ministry and the Holy Spirit is present here, vindicating it. The Father's voice attests to Christ's righteousness – "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." John tries to prevent Jesus from being baptized. John's baptism was intended for repentant sinners to come and participate in it. And John knew that Jesus was no sinner; he was perfectly righteous. But Jesus answers – "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus came to fulfill all righteousness. And yet He already was perfectly righteous in the sight of the Father. But he intended to take the place of sinners in all that He did. And so, in being baptized by John He was saying, "I intend by my obedience to you, My Father, to keep Your holy law, to keep each and every one of the commandments of Your holy law; and in doing so, I will keep them from a pure heart and right motives." "I will do all to Your glory." "And thus, I shall fulfill all righteousness by the obedience of my heart and my actions." "I intend to fulfill your law, Father, by doing all the good works necessary to work out a perfect righteousness on behalf of sinners." "I do this so that You, Father, will be able to impute My righteousness to everyone who believes in Me." "I will accomplish this by becoming a servant; humbling myself and being willing to be numbered with the transgressors, I will become obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." The Holy Spirit attested all of Jesus' righteous thoughts and words and intentions in His being baptized, and thus He identified with us who are sinners. We do not keep the law, but we do trust in the Lord Jesus who kept it perfectly.

In Luke's gospel, it says, "When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened." "And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are my beloved Son; in You I am well-pleased.'" Let us understand this afternoon that God is well-pleased with His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is pleased to look upon Him, and His righteousness, and not upon you and your sinfulness when you are trusting in Him and repenting of your sins. If you hold to your sins and pursue them instead of Christ, you will perish. But when you are going about by faith to do God's will, as one who has been saved by God through faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, God is pleased with you just as He is pleased with Him. Is there anything lacking in His righteousness? No, He has fulfilled all righteousness. Then, if He has fulfilled all righteousness, what is there left for you to fulfill in order to be pleasing in God's sight? Nothing. And so Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Yes, the moral law of God still is in place and intact, but we are not under law, we are under grace. Yes, God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, all 3 Persons of the Godhead, expect every Christian to keep God's law as rule of life. But where the Christian, in going about to do it, and in trying to keep it, they fail, there is no condemnation for them.

Now the Spirit's justification of Jesus' righteousness did not end here when He was baptized by John. It continued. It was the Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil.

And Jesus was vindicated there in the Spirit after rebuffing all Satan's attempts to get Him to act for His own glory and interest. John the Baptist says in John 1: 32 – "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and He remained upon Him." There was vindication; that the Spirit remained upon Jesus. Again, John the Baptist says in John 3: 31, "He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth." "He who comes from heaven is above all." "And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies." "And no one receives His testimony ." "He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true." "For He who God has sent speak the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure." That is vindication. That is Jesus' being justified of the Spirit.

But 3rd – The Holy Spirit vindicated our Lord Jesus Christ at the time of His resurrection.

This was the climax of the vindication of the Lord Jesus in, or by, the Spirit; when He raised Jesus from the dead. Turn with me over to Romans Chapter 1, and we will look at verses 1-4. "Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Because the Holy Spirit knew that Jesus had fulfilled all righteousness, in not only obeying all of God's commandments and keeping His holy law in every respect, but most especially in His willingly going to the cross there, to suffer for the sins of all of God's people, He knew that God's justice had been entirely satisfied, and so it says here that He "declared Jesus to be the Son of God" by raising Him from the dead. Jesus was justified in the Spirit. He knew that His sufferings and death had purchased everything needed for our salvation, and He was vindicated by the Holy Spirit from any charge that He was guilty of any crime, as the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the rulers of Israel had said. The Holy Spirit justified Jesus in all His work on behalf of sinners, because the Lord Jesus engaged in that work until it was completely finished. Since He died in the place of sinners as an innocent sacrifice, death could no longer hold Him as its captive. And so the Spirit of holiness declared Jesus to be the Son of God with power by raising Him from the dead.

Therefore, since Jesus has risen from the dead, sin's power has been broken in your heart, dear believer. And by faith in Jesus even the remaining corruption which you feel in your Old Man, will not be able to crawl back up on the throne of your life, dear Christian. Now power is given to live for Christ, and power is given to God's saints for holy living. Holiness flows out of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Spirit of holiness which was found in Christ was poured out on the Day of Pentecost. The Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit were, from that time forward, so closely identified as to be interchangeable in their working. The Spirit of holiness is the Spirit of Christ. You see this is several places of the New Testament. Let me give you two of them, and then I will close. Turn over to 1 Corinthians 15: 45 – "And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." "The last Adam became a life giving spirit." Now notice what follows; the connection to holiness. In verse 49 it says – "And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man." The Christian will go from pursuing holiness and perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord, to perfect holiness when they die. And then, look over at 2nd Corinthians 3, verse 17 – "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." "But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." The mystery of godliness is this: God was manifested in the flesh in Christ, and Jesus the Son of God was justified (or vindicated) in the Spirit. We see Christ's triumphal passage through this world and also in the hearts of all who believe in Him. Thanks be to God who always leads us in His triumph in Christ. (2nd Corinthians 2: 14)