

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

1 TIMOTHY 3:16 • TV073A

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1 Timothy 3:16

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

I want you to listen very carefully while I read my text from the book of **1 Timothy 3:16**.

I’m going to speak to you today on this subject: **“THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS.”**

Now this is an important Scripture. I think that we need to concentrate on single verses of Scripture or a part of God’s Word and ask the Holy Spirit to be our teacher and reveal unto us that which is written in some certain part of God’s Word instead of trying to read so much and cover so much territory and really not learn anything.

Listen to this verse in **1 Timothy 3:16**: *“Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of the angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world and received up into glory.”*

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Now, that's some assignment to understand what the apostle Paul is writing there, "*Without controversy.*" Someone has called this, "The summary of true religion."

I'll say this, this verse of Scripture certainly does not deal with trivial matters but it deals with the loftiest themes. It deals with important matters, "*God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of the angels, preached to the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory.*"

Even those who do not believe our Gospel will have to admit that we're dealing here with the greatest of themes, "*God was manifest in the flesh.*"

These subjects are not secondary and there's no room here for indifference. There's no room here for a callous spirit or a callous attitude. Either this is the most amazing revelation, either this is the most astounding revelation or it's the most astounding deception that's ever been put over on the human race.

This is either the most amazing revelation, "*God was manifest in the flesh.*" Now that is an amazing revelation or that's total deception. Do you see the importance of our theme, the importance of these verses?

No man can afford to be undecided about this if it's true. If this is true that God came to the earth then you can't afford to be undecided about this matter. It's too solemn, it's too great; right or wrong these words deserve our consideration and our investigation.

Listen to it again: "*Without controversy, (no argument here at all) great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of the angels.*"

Our theme is great because we are dealing with God. Anything about God is important to me and to you. But we're talking about God's visit to the world and any doctrine which relates to the infinite, eternal, immortal God, coming down to this earth in human flesh, is important. It's important to you and it's important to me.

It's great; great is this mystery that we're dealing with. And it's great because we are dealing with God's mercy to sinners, God's grace to you and me. "*He came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief.*"

This is good news. If this is true that God was manifest in the flesh, if this is true, if this is not total deception, if this is a true revelation; it is the most important thing that I can consider, the most important thing that I can look into.

And it's great because it affords us a hope of eternal life and of salvation. I have but one life. I have but one soul and that soul is under condemnation because of sin. I'm a sinner. I have to stand with the Publican in the temple and cry, "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*"

Well, if God was manifest in the flesh, and He came to this earth to save sinners, then this is my hope of mercy. Perhaps there is mercy for you and for me. Perhaps it's true.

**“Amazing love how can it be?
That thou my God should die for me.”**

Paul is saying that God came to the earth; God, who made all things, came to the earth. He was manifest in the flesh and He came to redeem sinners, and this is our hope. Do you know anything greater than that?

“Without controversy;” there's no argument here, if this is true, without controversy it's the greatest thing I can possibly have as my subject today. It's the greatest, it's the greatest and best news that you could possibly hear, *“God was manifest in the flesh.”*

Read it again.: *“Without controversy (without argument), “great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of the angels, believed on in the world, preached to the Gentiles, and received up to glory. God was manifest in the flesh.”*

There's no rattling of the chains of denominationalism here at all. It's the revelation of a living person. It's the visitation of the living God. The mystery of godliness is not some monstrous organization; the mystery of godliness is not sectarianism or peculiarities of doctrines, and codes, and laws and dress. It's the visit of a Person.

Paul's not rattling the chains of denominationalism and there's no setting forth here of complicated ceremonies. You don't hear the drops of water being sprinkled. You don't even see the baptisms.

You don't even see the ceremonies or the solemn feasts or the excited assemblies; this is talking about a Person who came to this earth. The mystery of godliness is not the rattling of the chains of denominationalism or the setting forth of complicated ceremonies.

And there's no exhibition here of doctrines and laws; it's the coming of a Person, not a system, a Person. It's the coming of a Redeemer, not a system of theology, not rules of conduct; this message is alive, not cold dead logic and cold dead doctrine, but it's living truth: *“Great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh.”*

And then there's no sensationalism of prophecy here. The apostle Paul is not suggesting what's going to happen in the future. He's talking about something that's already taken place. He's not talking about something that could happen or might happen but he's talking about something that did happen.

He's reporting a fact. He's delivering a message of something that's already taken place. That's what I'm interested in. I'm not interested in a man's view upon the future, his projection concerning prophecy. I'm not concerned with that at all.

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But I am interested in what has taken place. Without argument this is the greatest theme, this is the loftiest theme, this is the most important theme, God, that's who we are talking about, "*God was manifested in the flesh.*"

The Lord God came to earth. The Lord God became bone of our bone and flesh of my flesh. The Lord God in a human body bled and died on a cross. The Lord God was raised from the dead and ascended back to glory where He's seated at the right hand of the majesty on high.

The Lord God came to this earth. That is the mystery of godliness. That's the essence of our Gospel. That's the heart of our message. That's the good news that we proclaim. We preach Christ and Him crucified.

Phillip one day said to the Master: "*Lord; show us the Father and it will suffice us.*" Now that's a good question isn't it? That's what we like to see. Phillip said; "Lord; we'd like to see the Father, we'd like to see Him."

And our Lord Jesus Christ looked at Phillip and He said: "*Phillip have I been so long time with you, (three and a half years) and yet you don't know me? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. I and my Father are one: God was manifest in human flesh.*" That's what we are saying.

Now, I want to show you six things. I'd like for you to jot these down and some of the comments and Scriptures that I use. Let's do a little teaching today.

We need to study "*to show ourselves approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,*" not for the sake of argument, but for the salvation of our souls because, "*faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.*"

Now there's no argument here. This is a great and grand theme. This is the grandest of themes, "*God was manifest in the flesh. He was justified in the Spirit. He was seen of the angels. He preached to the Gentiles. He's believed on in the world and He's received up to glory.*"

And there are six things here that Paul calls our attention to and the first one is this:

First of all: God was manifest in the flesh!

Now my friend; this is the most extraordinary fact ever declared in human language. God, now think of it, God, God almighty, whom the heavens cannot contain, He says; "*The earth is His footstool. The inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers.*" He beholds, "*The nations as a drop in the bucket.*"

"*God was manifest in human flesh.*" God came to the earth in a human body. That's what we're saying. God was manifest in the flesh. "*The Word was made flesh and dwelt, (actually dwelt) among us.*"

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The manger at Bethlehem holds the Lord of glory. Do you believe that? That's what he is saying; *"Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given. And thou shalt call His name Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father."*

That's who this child is: *"Unto us a child is born and a Son is given."* *"God sent forth His Son made of a woman."* She wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger.

The man of Galilee is none other than the eternal God, the Son of the highest, yet *"a man of sorrows."* The King of King's and yet *"despised and rejected."* The giver of life and yet He died. That's what we are saying; *"Great is the mystery of godliness."*

And the first great mystery is this, *"God was manifest in human flesh."* Jesus Christ is not a Son of God He is the Son of God. Now, *"He gave us the power, (the privilege, the right) to become sons of God,"* but never in the sense that He is the Son of God; He is, *"The only begotten Son of God."*

The Father said, *"This is my Son; hear ye Him."* Now one day He said to His disciples: *"Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"* Well, his disciples said, *"Some say you are John the Baptist and some say you are Elijah and some say you are one of the prophets."*

And that's about all men can say about Jesus Christ who do not really know Him. He's a great prophet, a great healer, a great reformer, or a great teacher, or a great preacher, or something else. But He turned to His disciples again and He said, *"But whom do you say that I the Son of man am?"*

And the apostle Peter said, *"Thou art the Christ, (the Messiah) the Son of the living God."* And He said, *"Blessed art thou Simon Barjona; flesh and blood did not reveal that to you but my Father which is in heaven."*

God; (now don't ever lose sight of this fact) *"God was manifest in the flesh."* And it matters a great deal who He is; now listen to me, because who He is determines the value of what He did. If He's not God He's not your Saviour. He can't save Himself, let alone you and me if He's not God.

If He's just an ordinary man; I don't care how good a man, or how fine a man, or how outstanding a man, if He's just a man he's a partaker of man's fall, and man's sin, and man's guilt, man's inability and man's weakness.

If He can't save Himself and if He's only a man; His bones are still over there in Jerusalem in that tomb and His soul's in hell, because He's a liar, He deceived the world. He said He was the Son of God.

And what they said about Him was so. If He's not the Son of God He's a blasphemer. If He's not the Son of God He deserves to be in hell because He misled people. But Jesus Christ is God almighty.

In **Hebrews Chapter 1:8** the Father said about the Son, *“Unto the Son, He saith, Thy throne O God is forever.”*

Without an argument *“Great is the mystery of godliness.”* We are talking about godliness now, salvation and redemption. *“God was manifest in the flesh.”*

Secondly: He was justified in the Spirit!

What does that mean? It’s talking about the Holy Spirit, justified in the Spirit. Now listen to this, a religion; I don’t care whose religion it is, a religion demands your attention in proportion to the certainty of its teachings and the truthfulness of its testimony.

Now you think about that. A religion demands your attention in proportion, in proportion to the certainty of its teachings and the truthfulness of its testimony. Christ said; Jesus Christ Himself said this: *“If I bear witness of myself, (if I’m the only one who knows who I am, if I’m the only one who bears witness of who I am, if I am the only one, only witness), my witness is not true.”*

Every self-made, self-proclaimed prophet is a phony. That’s right, it doesn’t matter who it is. If he’s the only one that knows who he is and he’s the only witness he has, he’s a phony. But our Lord Jesus Christ has the witness of the Father; He said: *“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”*

He has the witness of His works. Nicodemus said: *“No man can do the works you do except God be with Him.”* He has the witness of the Scripture. The whole Old Testament declares who He is and why He came to this earth and what He came to do.

And He has the witness of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit justifies His claims. That’s what He is saying. *“Great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifested in the flesh justified in the Spirit (or by the Holy Spirit His claims are justified.)”*

For example: The formation of His body in the womb of Mary was by the Holy Spirit. That’s what the angel said to Joseph: *“That Holy thing which shall be born of Mary shall be called the Son of God.”*

And the angel said to Mary, *“The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee. The power of the highest shall overshadow thee and you’ll bear a Son.”* So, the formation of His body in the womb was by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit descended upon Him at His baptism in the form of a dove. That’s right! God told John the Baptist; *“Upon whom you see, the Spirit descends.”* That’s the Son of God; that’s the Lamb of God and John testified to that. And then the voice from heaven said: *“This is my Son.”*

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And then He was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit. It was by the power of the Spirit that He was raised from the dead. Now you can visit the grave of Buddha. You can visit the grave of Muhammad. You can visit the grave of Confucius, that's right; they are right there where the people buried them or left them.

You can't visit the grave of Jesus Christ; He's not there. The angel said: "*He's not here; He's risen.*" That's what I'm saying; the Holy Spirit raised Him from the dead and justified His claims. He said: "*I am the Son of God.*" And His claims were justified by many witnesses.

And then the disciples, His disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit, the Comforter was sent to testify concerning the things of Christ. "*This is the mystery of godliness.*"

Thirdly: He's seen of the angels!

How many religious events concerning man's denominations and man's efforts have been witnessed and have been proclaimed by the angels of God? You say; "None" and you would be exactly right, "none."

But everything Jesus Christ did was witnessed and testified of and unto and seen of the angels. In other words, at His birth, when He came to this earth, the angel stood out there on the Judean hillside and said to the shepherds, "*We bring you glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour who is none other than Christ the Lord.*"

The angels announced that. All these great prophets and messiahs that had come into the world; I haven't heard any angels proclaiming who they are and where they were born and what they came to do. But Jesus Christ; the angel said to the shepherds: "*There's your Saviour; He's born in the city of David.*"

And then in the wilderness of temptation when He fasted 40 days and Satan tempted Him; the angels of God came down and ministered to Him.

And then when our Lord Jesus Christ was buried and the women came to the tomb that Sunday morning, the first day of the week, to anoint the body; they came to the tomb and the stone was rolled away.

And there stood the angels of God and they said to the women: "*Why do you seek the living among the dead? He's not here; He's risen.*" The angels announced that.

And then, when He led His disciples out there on the hillside that day that He was ascending back to the Father, a cloud received Him out of their sight. And the angels appeared to the disciples and they said: "*Ye men of Galilee; why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go.*"

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And then the Scripture says, when He comes again He will come with a voice of the ark angel. Everything He did was seen of the angels and witnessed to the angels. And God said in **Hebrews 1:6**: “*When He bringeth in the first begotten into the world, He saith: Let all the angels of God worship Him.*”

Who is Jesus Christ? Let the angels tell you. They’ll tell you who He is. He’s the Saviour. He’s Redeemer. He’s the coming King seen of angels. “*Great is the mystery of Godliness.*” Great is our theme, “*Seen of the angels.*”

Fourthly: Preached to the Gentiles!

Now you will have to stay with me here, will you, “*Preached to the Gentiles?*” Now, is the preaching of the Gospel of the grace of God to the Gentiles a mystery, a wonder? “Now I understand preacher how that the God manifested in the flesh is a mystery and how that He was justified in the Spirit and witnessed too by the Spirit.”

That’s a mystery. I don’t understand the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I believe it but it’s a mystery. And Christ seen of the angels; the angels are a mystery. But the fact that the Gospel is preached to the Gentiles is that a mystery, is that a wonder, is that amazing? Yes it is!

Do you know why? The nearest thing to God is an angel. What’s the farthest thing from God? Read your Old Testament; a Gentile dog, that’s right, a Gentile, that’s the farthest thing from God.

In other words, we are called, we Gentiles; most of you listening to me are Gentiles. **Ephesians 2:11-12** calls us, “*Uncircumcised, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers in the world, having no hope, without God in this world.*”

You talk about the pride. When the Lord told the disciples that they were to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles they were totally surprised. You read Peter’s reaction to it, he said; “*I’ve never eaten anything that’s unclean.*”

God had to give him a vision in order to persuade him to go down and preach the Gospel to Cornelius. He was objecting to it. They had never had fellowship with a Gentile or social contact with a Gentile or religious contact with a Gentile. Gentiles were without the Kingdom and they didn’t want the Gentiles.

And the fact that they would have preached the Gospel to the Gentiles was a reproach to them. That’s right! Paul said, “I go to the Gentiles.” Our Lord said, “*Go ye, into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, (yea, even to the Gentiles).*”

And John said: “*Christ died not only for our sins but for the sins of the world, (not only you Jews, but for the Gentiles too).*” That’s a mystery.

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“Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of the angels, preached to the Gentiles.”

Fifthly: *“And believed on in the world, believed on!”*

Now, I see here that Paul calls the incarnation of Christ a mystery. I see he calls the witness of the Spirit and the angels a mystery. I see he calls the grace of God to the Gentiles a mystery but why does he call faith in Christ a mystery?

Aren't we expected to believe in Christ? Aren't we commanded to believe in Christ? Aren't we exhorted to believe in Christ? Then why would the apostle Paul call it a mystery when a man does believe in Christ?

I'll tell you why; because the natural man does not and cannot and will not believe the things of God; *“They are foolishness to him.” “Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered the heart of man, the things God hath prepared for them that love Him.”*

No sir! He will not believe the things of God. *“They are foolishness to him and his natural mind is enmity against God.”* Oh, men know of God's existence, but His essence is revealed in Christ. Men know of God's worth but His will is revealed in Christ and His wisdom.

Men know of God's power but His purpose is revealed in Christ. Men know of God's miracles but His mercy is revealed in Christ. Men know of God's judgment but His justice is revealed in Christ.

And these things have to be revealed. They have to be taught by the Holy Spirit. *“The natural man cannot receive the things of God; they are foolishness to him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit for the Spirit searches, yea, the deep things of God”* and God makes them known to us.

That's what He said to Peter and to the other apostles: *“Blessed are your eyes, they see. Blessed are your ears, they hear. God the Father hath revealed these things unto you, the mystery of godliness.”*

I'll tell you this, if you have been blessed to believe the Word of God; you thank God, you praise God, because it's a mystery. Left to yourself you would never believe it because the natural man doesn't walk by faith. Faith is foreign to him.

Faith is not a flower that blooms in the garden of the human heart; it is only a flower that is planted by God and nourished by God and sustained by God and is the gift of God.

God has granted you repentance. God has given to you faith. Faith does not come by nature. You're skeptical, unbelievers by nature but by grace you are believers.

All right; here's the last one:

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Sixthly: He was received up into glory!

“Great is the mystery of godliness.” This is no simple thing. This is no simple message. It’s a profound truth that God came down here to the earth and that He died on a cross for our sins and that He’s received back into glory.

Now here’s what we’re saying here. Do you realize the importance of the resurrection of Christ? Do you realize the importance of the ascension of Christ and the acceptance of Christ and the exultation of Christ and the seating of Christ on God’s right hand?

“If Christ be not risen ye are yet in your sins” because the Surety must be accepted. The sacrifice must be accepted or we are yet in our guilt and our sins. He is at the right hand of God as our Intercessor, our Mediator.

“Great is the mystery of godliness!”