

# The Mystery of Godliness

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[ 0 : 00 ] But tomorrow evening churches all over this island and around the Bahamas will be filled with tens of thousands of people as they gather in what is called watch night services.

We believe that the new year needs to find you in church and many people would even show up just minutes before midnight to be in church when the new year rolls in.

And sadly many of them will hear messages. There will be some exceptions no doubt. But largely they will hear messages that are man centered and that are moralistic.

Calling them to change. Calling them to turn over a new leaf and start a new life and stop doing this and start doing that. Stop this sin. Stop drinking.

Stop committing adultery. Stop committing fornication. Stop gambling. Stop gossiping. Stop. The list goes on. And they'll be encouraged to come to church.

[ 1 : 25 ] And in short they will be encouraged to live a godly life. But we know those of us who have come to trust in Christ and to believe in his word.

Living a godly life is more than living a moral life. It's more than being a moral person.

It's possible to be a moral person and not be a godly person. But it is impossible to be a godly person and not be a moral person.

And in this single verse that we are considering this morning that we have come to as we close 2018 on a Sunday morning.

The single verse that we are considering this morning. The apostle Paul lays out the basis for a godly life. And so if you've not yet turned there, would you please turn to 1 Timothy chapter 3.

[ 2 : 31 ] And although our attention this morning will be focused on the single verse, verse 16, I want to begin reading in verse 14. 1 Timothy chapter 3, beginning in verse 14.

And I hope to leave time at the end for questions if there are any. Paul writes, 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.

Let's pray. Father, we're grateful this morning that we're able to gather as a church.

We're able to lift our voices in song and in prayer to you. And now to sit under the preaching of your word.

[ 4 : 08 ] Let's speak to our hearts. We ask, Lord, that you would grant us illumination as we consider this text this morning.

Lord, I need your help that I have prayed for privately and I now do so publicly. Lord, no one is sufficient to proclaim your word to your people.

So, Father, I pray that you would cause my sufficiency to be of you. And I ask, Lord, that you would grant us all the ability to hear as we ought, that we might obey as we should.

Help us, Lord, to live the lives that are pleasing in your sight. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. The Apostle Paul wrote the letter of 1 Timothy to his spiritual son, Timothy.

And to the church that he pastored in the city of Ephesus. And in verses 14 and 15, we find the reason that the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy and to the Ephesians.

[ 5 : 27 ] He writes, I hope to come to you soon. But I am writing these things 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.

Paul's reason for writing to Timothy was that he was concerned that God's people knew how to conduct themselves. And Paul was not talking about how they behaved in a building.

Because the truth is, they didn't have them. They would have met in homes. And interestingly, Paul would have just been talking about how elders are to govern their homes.

How they are to lead their homes. And now he would refer to God's people as the household of God. And when Paul talks about how we are to conduct ourselves, how we are to behave, he's not talking about how we behave in a building, but how we behave as the building.

The building of God, as the people of God, as the spiritual house of God. And Paul was concerned about this. So concerned that he did not want to leave to chance.

[ 6 : 48 ] The possibility that he may be delayed. And Timothy would not have the benefit of these instructions. And here in 1 Timothy 3.16, the Apostle Paul helps us to see that godliness, this life that he was certainly calling the church to, this conduct that he was calling them to, that godliness, this life you're called to live, is not a list of do's and don'ts.

Even though it can appear to be that, since those who are godly abstain from certain ways of living. They abstain from sinful practices.

And they seek to do godly things. Paul makes it very clear that this life of godliness is not a list of do's and don'ts.

What the Apostle Paul helps us to see in verse 16 is that godliness is rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Godliness is rooted in the person and the work of Jesus Christ. And since we are in such a time where truth has fallen on hard times, I would add a word to that and say, true godliness is rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[ 8 : 24 ] In other words, it is the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is his life and his death, without which it would be impossible for any one of us to truly live a godly life that God calls his people to.

He just couldn't do it. And that's because God himself transforms and changes the lives of people who have put their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

It's not a list of do's and don'ts. It's not a list of regulations. Here in 1 Timothy 3.16, the Apostle Paul refers to godliness as a mystery.

It's an interesting word for us. And a word that we sometimes confuse to think that it means something that is hidden or something that is mysterious to understand.

But in the New Testament, when the word mystery is used, it's used in a different way. It has a totally different meaning. Mystery in the New Testament means something that was formerly hidden that God has now revealed.

[ 9 : 46 ] It was formerly hidden, but now it is revealed. And here in verse 16, the Apostle Paul shares with us what has been revealed about godliness.

Godliness. And it is this. Godliness is rooted in Christ. And then Paul proceeds to remind Timothy and the church of this truth by restating in verse 16 what theologians, many theologians, believe was a well-known confession of the church at that time.

It was a formulation of words that communicated what the church believed. And in particular, what the church believed about Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ is both the center and the controversial point of the Christian faith.

And this was something that they believed. They believed it deep in the core of their being. This was not just mere words. They believed this to the point that they were willing to die for it.

And indeed, some of them did die for it. This was the foundational theology of the church. the basis upon which godliness is possible.

[ 11 : 11 ] And again, it was a corporate confession of the church at that time. And to be able to appreciate why this would have been that way, we have to remember what the church would have looked like at that time.

The church started in Jerusalem. It was a Jewish church predominantly, but as the church grew and as the church spread, it became predominantly a Gentile church.

And these Gentiles would have come from a non-Jewish background without the backdrop of the Old Testament. They would have come out of paganism. And what they would have been hearing, these things would have been new.

As a matter of fact, even the idea of Jesus Christ as Lord and God would be foreign to Jews who had the Old Testament. And they didn't have Bibles.

Like all of us, we have Bibles. Personal copies. Some of us, multiple copies. And we have so much that we can know and understand about God revealed in Jesus Christ.

[12:17] They didn't have that in those days. The scriptures that they had, the Old Testament scriptures, were written on parchment. It's just this very expensive material from the skin of animals.

And it was rare. You didn't own a copy of that in an ordinary way. And the New Testament was just being written at the time. It wasn't completed as Paul is writing this.

And so much of the instruction for the church was oral. They were told. And they heard it. It was verbally expressed. And one of the ways that the church leaders sought to teach the church and instruct the church was through confessions or through hymns.

Words that they would craft that they could memorize and they can be able to confess together. And so theologians believe that this formulation that we find in verse 16 that Paul says, great indeed we confess is the mystery of godliness.

And he lays out these statements. They believe that this was such a confession. A confession that was formulated to help the church to understand the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[13:41] Who's the foundation of the church. Who's the head of the church. Who's the center of the church. This was the truth that they were to uphold and to live out.

This verse, verse 16, these statements that the apostle Paul gives they are a kind of summary of the journey of Christ into this world and out of this world.

They speak about the entirety of his life and his ministry on the earth. And Paul expresses the mystery of godliness in these six statements about Christ.

theologians who actually believe that in the crafting of these statements that they are paired together. There are six of them and so they are paired together in three groups.

And they are first manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit. Those two connected together. Seen by angels, proclaim among the nations.

[15:00] And then believed on in the world, taken up into glory. in his comments on this verse, in his commentary on 1 Timothy, deceased British pastor and theologian John Stott summarizes these three paired statements under three very helpful summary headings.

The first one is the revelation of Christ. Christ. And so we summarize, he was manifested in the flesh and vindicated in the spirit. And the second, the witnesses of Christ is his summary for he was seen by angels proclaimed among the nations.

And then the reception of Christ is his summary for he was believed on in the world and taken up into glory. And so this morning I want to follow John Stott's summarized headings of these six statements about Christ.

And so the first one, please forgive me. Okay, there we go. The first one, the revelation of Christ. In this first statement we are told he was manifested in the flesh.

He was manifested in the flesh. This brief statement refers to the incarnation, the truth that God came down, that God became man, that God condescended from heaven to earth.

[16:49] He who was God a very God took on human form, he became flesh. flesh. This is what we confess. We confess that not a great prophet, not a great teacher, not a miracle worker, not a great healer, but God himself came down in human flesh.

This is what we celebrate at Christmas. He humbled himself and from a human vantage point, it was humiliating for God to become man.

And being born in the squalor of a stable is a vivid picture of what it is like for God to leave heaven and come down to earth taking on human flesh.

And brothers and sisters, let us remember that these words manifested in the flesh are not in a vacuum. Christ was manifested in the flesh for a particular reason.

He was manifested in the flesh to reconcile God and man as the God-man who could mediate between God and who could mediate between man.

[18:08] He was manifested and he would die a cruel death on the cross. He was manifested in the flesh, communicates the truth that Jesus came to this earth to die.

In the words of Matthew, that he may save his people from their sins. But that's the first part of the confession.

The connected part is vindicated by the Spirit. You know, to the natural eye, when Jesus came into this world, he was no different from anyone else who came into this world.

Jesus was born like any other baby was born. Mary's childbirth was no different from any other childbirth.

Jesus had an umbilical cord that needed to be cut. He needed to be cleaned. He was no different in terms of how he came into the world. His family treated him no differently than the other siblings were treated.

[ 19 : 15 ] the teachers of the law, the political leaders saw him as no different from any other human being and they treated him likewise. At best, people saw him as one of the prophets.

But really, he was no different in their eyes. He looked no different. He was no different. But he was different. He was the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity who came down to earth from heaven and the Holy Spirit vindicated him as such.

Though Jesus walked under the cloud of human indifference and disregard because of what he appeared to be in the flesh, the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity vindicated Jesus and the primary way that Jesus was vindicated by the Spirit was when he arose from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This word for vindication is also the same word for justification and so if you have the King James Version, you would see that Jesus was justified in the Spirit.

That's what it says in 1 Timothy 3.16 in your translation. He was justified in the Spirit. And justification is a legal declaration. It is a declaration over someone.

[ 20 : 47 ] So regarding the resurrection, what it means is that through the resurrection, the Holy Spirit declared Jesus to be the Son of God, the Savior of the world, not just an ordinary human being who came in the world and who was a pious religious man, the Spirit of God vindicated him.

He said, no, he is different. This is the Son of God, the Savior of the world who's come into the world. pastor and theologian and college president Phil Riken gives a very helpful commentary on this aspect of this statement vindicated by the Spirit.

In his commentary in 1 Timothy, he writes, When was Jesus vindicated? The Holy Spirit proved Jesus was who he claimed to be throughout his earthly ministry.

The Spirit proved it was at Jesus' baptism when he descended, the Holy Spirit proved it at Jesus' baptism when he descended upon him from heaven like a dove.

You see that in Matthew 3.16. He proved it by preserving Jesus from sin throughout his earthly ministry. He proved it whenever he performed miracles, especially when he drove out demons.

[ 22 : 19 ] And then he goes on. The Spirit vindicated the Son in all these ways, but most of all, he did it through the resurrection. When Christians think about the resurrection, we usually think first of God the Son who was raised up from the grave.

We may even remember that it was God the Father who raised him. But Easter Sunday is also a day to praise God the Holy Spirit. The resurrection was such an important event that it required the work of each member of the Trinity.

God the Father raised God the Son from the dead by the power of God the Holy Spirit. This, brothers and sisters, we confess that Jesus was revealed to be the Son of God both when he was manifested in the flesh in his incarnation and when he was vindicated by the Spirit in his resurrection.

I think that we can sometimes maybe read too fast so we don't think enough about the life that Jesus lived with his family who didn't see him for who he was as he lived and even for his own disciples who did not see him for who he was as he was among them.

it took the vindication of the Spirit of God three years approximately after he had lived on this earth to raise him up and say this indeed is the Son of God.

[ 24 : 08 ] This indeed is the Savior of the world and it is through that vindication that these disciples who were careful for their own lives, protecting their own lives would then go on and lay their own lives down and die for this one who they now see is the Son of the Living God.

Is it not interesting that the Apostle Peter the one who got the revelation about Jesus that he was the Christ the Son of the Living God that he is the one who openly and in the most graphic way they all betrayed him but Peter betrayed him three times even after getting that revelation the Spirit in the end vindicated the Lord Jesus and enabled these disciples so believe that they were willing to die for him.

In the next two statements we see second the witnesses of Christ first we're told that Jesus was seen by angels angels witnessed the Son of God coming from heaven to earth as the Savior of the world the gospel writers tell us on several occasions that Jesus was seen by angels first we read in Luke 2 13 through 14 that angels sang at his birth Mark tells us in Mark 1 12 through 13 that angels

ministered to him when he was tempted in the wilderness and ministered didn't just mean they rubbed his head or something ministered meant they spoke to him they addressed him they communicated to him angels are intelligent beings in the same way the angel was able to go and address

Mary and address Zechariah these angels would have ministered to Jesus and these angels were not ignorant of the divine plan these angels would have seen Satan himself fall from heaven they would understand the fall of man they would understand the need for redemption they would understand God's plan through this person the second person of the Godhead the son of God to bring redemption Luke also tells us in Luke 22 verse 43 that an angel appeared to him and strengthened him when he was praying in the garden of Gethsemane the gospel writers also tell us that angels witnessed the resurrection and then finally Luke the writer of the book of the Acts of the Apostles tells us in Acts 1 9 through 11 that angels witnessed the ascension of Jesus into heaven in his commentary on this line of the confession in 1 Timothy 3 16 theologian Thomas Oden succinctly summarizes these angelic sightings of Jesus this way referring to the angels he writes these ministering spirits sang at his birth ministered in his hour of temptation guarded his sepulcher attested his ascension and expected his return so part of the confession of the church is angels saw the son of God when he had taken on human form and again we can only imagine the thoughts of the angels when they saw the one who created them who had taken on human form who had taken on flesh in order to redeem fallen mankind we can only imagine the thoughts going through the minds of the angels as they beheld their creator as they beheld the one who would come and die to redeem fallen mankind and so what we have what the formulation is telling us is that we have not just earthly witnesses we have not just men who have proclaimed these truths who have seen the son of

[ 29 : 04 ] God but there's also the heavenly witness there's a witness among the angels as well connected this fourth part of the confession is the next part proclaimed among the nations as Jesus ascended into heaven he commanded his eleven apostles to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all the nations they could now go and legitimately do that to all the nations because Jesus had resurrected from the dead we call this the great commission the proclamation was about the person and the work of Jesus Christ and the fact that there is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved and so the disciples began in Jerusalem and then in

Judea and Samaria and to the nations beyond and they preached Christ and not just Christ they preached Christ crucified they preached Christ raised from the dead they preached Christ ascended into heaven they preached Christ coming again Christ was preached to the nations by those who were eyewitnesses of his life and death and resurrection and then we who have come to believe their testimony we also preach Christ and we preach Christ crucified and here we see the contrast between the heavenly witnesses the angels and the earthly witnesses men and women who proclaim Christ among the nations and then third and finally we come to the third summary the reception of Christ the first is believed on in the world the gospel was preached among the nations people believed on Jesus and as the gospel is preached today people believe and as it was in Paul's day we who believe in Jesus because he has been preached been preached to us we give evidence to this great confession that Jesus was manifested in the flesh he was vindicated by the spirit he was seen of angels he was proclaimed among the nations and he was believed on into the world when we believe we give credence to that we believe the message of Christ that has been proclaimed to us and we hear this morning and you don't know Jesus Christ as Lord and personal savior this fifth line of the great confession can be true for you as well if you put your faith and your trust in Jesus I've been having a lot of conversations with people recently as of late

I should say and one of the things that's increasingly evident to me is that there are many people who don't understand the Bible's meaning of believe they don't understand the Bible's meaning of believe when we read believed on in the world a lot of people believe that that is simply believing the facts about Jesus and if it's just believing the facts about Jesus I would venture to say and the people who believe that once you believe those facts about Jesus that you will be saved and you'll go to heaven the majority of the Bahamas will go to heaven based on that but that's what believe on in the world means when we believe on Jesus we will live for Jesus when we believe on Jesus we will demonstrate that in terms of how we live we don't believe anything that we are unwilling to act upon and that is the test believing is living believing on Jesus is evidenced by the fact that you live for

Jesus and truly someone should be able to look at our lives and look at how we live and for whom we live and be able to tell if we truly believe in Jesus it shouldn't be just a verbal confession yeah I believe in Jesus and our lives are saying something completely different and this is one of the great deceptions today where the enemy is causing many people to believe that because they have some data about Jesus and because they even feel warm in their hearts about Jesus that they believe in him and the truth is anyone who is away from God who has not been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ hates God and hates Jesus and we can see I've seen it

[ 35 : 04 ] I've seen people just openly outwardly living in total rebellion to God and in total rebellion to the Lord Jesus Christ and then mouth and say well I love Jesus I love Jesus he's been so good to me how could I not love him he's been so good to me but the sixth and final part of the confession which is the corresponding part of the reception of Christ is taken up in glory taken up in glory this clause taken up in glory seems best to refer to the ascension of Christ because the same verb taken is found in the account of the ascension that we read about in Acts chapter 1 verse 9 but some question that because they say well it seems like this confession is moving in a particular sequence manifested in the spirit and vindicated manifested in the flesh vindicated by the spirit seen by angels proclaimed among the nations believed on the world take up taken up in glory because Jesus was taken up in the glory prior to the gospel going to the nations prior to the nations believing on him so it seems to be out of out of sequence but it is fitting to have taken up in glory at the end of the confession because the ascension is a part of the promise that we read about in Acts 111 where it says the same Jesus who you see taken up from you will in like manner one day return and so it's an important reminder at the end of the confession that

Jesus left this world he left his savior he will return as judge and he will one day judge the world rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked and so in these two final parts of the confession we see the reception of Jesus in terms of him being believed on in the world and then also being taken up or received in glory brothers and sisters we who have come to put our trust in Jesus Christ are to join in this great confession of godliness we are to join in this great confession of the mystery of godliness that this is how godliness is possible this is how we are able to live godly lives that bring glory and honor to god it is the basis for living transformed lives the church is called to support this the church is called to defend this and to defend the rest of the truth that's connected to it and we make a grave mistake of all we see is that these are words to memorize these are words to just confess now these are words that are to affect how we actually live because we believe them I want to conclude with a somewhat lengthy quotation from Philip Ryken when he concluded his commentary on this section of Paul's letter to Timothy here's what he writes what does it mean to live worthily of the mystery of godliness since Jesus was manifested in the flesh let us glorify him with our bodies let us use our hands to help our lips to bless and our minds to serve since Jesus was vindicated by the spirit let us pray that we ourselves will be vindicated on the day of judgment let us ask God to prove that we belong to him by giving us glorious resurrection bodies since Jesus was seen by messengers let us join the angels and the apostles in their worship around the throne since Jesus was and is proclaimed among the nations let us testify to his grace declaring the glory sorry declaring the gospel to everyone we love and sharing in the worldwide work of missions so that all peoples might praise him since Jesus was and is believed on in the world let us believe on him with all our hearts for salvation as well as for everything else we need last of all since Jesus was taken up in glory let us await his soon return with eager expectation longing for the day when we will see the great mystery for ourselves may God help us as a church to believe and to live this great confession for the glory of

God amen let's pray Lord thank you for the transforming work that you do by the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who believe that the mystery of godliness revealed by and through and on the basis of the person and the work of Jesus Christ will be evident in our lives to those around us Lord we not only want to let this confession be words we speak we want this confession to be words we live out because we truly believe that

[ 42 : 08 ] Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God the only way to God the one who reconciles God and man and the one who enables us to live in this fallen world saying no to ungodliness and saying yes to righteousness and living godly lives that bring honor and glory to your name God help us to live this out we pray in Jesus name amen amen any questions from the sermon any questions no ho