

Great is the Mystery

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- [0 : 0 0] I just want to begin by immediately just reading what's in front of us because it's there. 1 Timothy 3.16. We'll put a bit of context around it later, of course.
- It stands alone wonderfully, I think. So, great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion. He was manifested in the flesh, indicated in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, lived on in the world, taken up in glory.
- 1 Timothy 3.16. That makes me want to pray. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this great mystery that we're going to look at today.
- May we be teachable, patient in our inquiry, and we look forward to you teaching us.
- May we grow in the things of the faith, to the glory of your great and glorious name. We pray these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.
- [1 : 1 6] Those are good words. If you have a love for the dramatic, there's an element of drama in creeds, for unique moments of drama, would the landing, Neil Armstrong's landing and stepping out and onto the moon's surface rank high with you?
- I always enjoy remembering that. I'm dating myself. Specifically, when you recall the moon landing, it was called the Eagle. I thought that was appropriate, landed, or more specifically, as it descended.
- Apparently, the NASA technicians and engineers and others were tense and very quiet. After all, now something might go wrong. What if they landed wrongly and the Eagle tipped over, if you will?
- Things, after all, do go wrong. I thought putting that might be something on your tombstone. Things do go wrong. W.C. Fields.
- But it all unfolded as planned, as we all know. That voice traveling through space, saying things somewhat techie, as we now say.
- [2 : 3 0] And then after a few, he spoke a few numbers, Neil Armstrong, I'm sure it was, as I recall again. Then something like, I wish I could remember specifically what this is. Maybe Dr. Hill would.
- We were told last week that Dr. Hill was actually the power behind the whole event. Or close, too. Landing gear, something was engaged, or something like that.
- Then there was a silence. And do you remember this? I'm quite sure this is exactly how it went. That voice coming across such a great distance. And it was something like, it was Neil Armstrong, hello, Houston, he said.
- Tranquility base here. They had decided, obviously, beforehand to call it Tranquility Base. Hello, Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed. A great moment in history, for sure.
- The Eagle has landed. That, I think that was drama. Real world drama. But drama's not all the same. It takes different forms. You recall Tolkien, the Lord of the Rings author, was a great philologist.

[3 : 34] And he coined a word. Lovers of words, that's what philologists are. They should be, I take it, permission to make up the odd new word. You'll recall, he invented the word, I think it was he invented the word, eucatastrophe.

I got the pronunciation correct. Eucatastrophe. Which is defined as, and this is from memory, but this is the gist of it. Eucatastrophe, Tolkien wanted it to mean, the completely unexpected arrival of staggering good news.

Something like that. The completely unexpected arrival of staggering good news. The moon landing, otherwise than unexpected, was long and publicly prepared.

We were told how it was all supposed to go, and happily it did. But if I understand, again, Tolkien's eucatastrophe, it is, another kind of drama is unexpected in its outcome.

Perhaps it had been once imagined or dreamt of, but no longer seriously considered. That's my way of saying that the gospel, the good news drama, is its own kind of drama.

[4 : 47] It was long announced, we believe, as believers, don't we? Like the moon landing, therefore. It was remembered as a hope, even as it unfolded in the first century.

The context from which Dr. Hill spoke to us last week about resurrection. But it was, by many, a remote, somewhat unreal expectation. Sometimes all of our hopes in life get like that, don't they?

Its arrival in the world, the gospel arrival in the world, took the world by surprise, we can say. Took its first believers by surprise, for sure.

When Jesus stood, again, this echoes last week, I realize so much. When Jesus stood in faith as he stands, put it in the present tense now, as he stood there in the midst of his disciples, raised up out of death, in a new body, in a new body, in, I suppose, the first display of what Paul calls the spiritual body.

There is, they were looking at the new humanity, the second Adam, it came to be called. There was the future of the world. And it was also surprising.

[6 : 04] The story or the drama of the world has been transformed from catastrophe to Tolkien's eucatastrophe. A great, unexpected deliverance.

An amazing arrival of good news has arrived. From catastrophe to eucatastrophe. Maybe eucatastrophe comes clear, you see, it's contrast words.

It's catastrophe to eucatastrophe. I've always found John 20, 20, the most remarkable verse. One of the great verses in the Bible. It seems so understated.

He says then, and he's talking about the disciples seeing the risen Jesus. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. I'll bet they were.

They were overwhelmed. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. So in our faith in the Bible, announcement beforehand and surprising fulfillment, it seems to me, are both present.

[7 : 06] Announcement beforehand and yet surprising fulfillment go together in the Bible. A kind of somehow openness and hiddenness are part of or contribute to the drama or the mystery.

Hence, however, heaven gives an appropriate clarity and an appropriate invitation to know more of an infinite depth of meaning.

Or to know more about its hiddenness. And in our faith, it always works that way. An appropriate clarity. But it's not exhaustive, if you will.

There's an infinite depth of meaning further to be explored. And over it all, of course, God is sovereign. The most high God.

God is not... This is not the kind of sentence you ever want to speak out loud at breakfast or earlier than breakfast. I like a great theologian who's a metaphysician.

[8 : 15] It says, God is not a high over against the low. But is an infinite act of distance. Giving to high and low their place.

That's how high our God is. He's an infinite... If you want to stay with the metaphor of high-low, says this good theologian. I'm sure he's a good one. God is an infinite act of distance.

He gives the high and low their meaning. Or, if this little set of words that we are going to look at today is like a drama. Our God is both the one who wrote the drama.

He's the playwright. And he's also the one, mysteriously, so mysteriously, who entered into the drama himself. And so, it's that kind of God, that kind of truth that we're looking at today when we look at 1 Timothy 3.16.

Our passage is in 1 Timothy. And here Paul instructs his young colleague, if you recall, in matters of church government.

[9 : 26] And on occasion, in the pastoral epistles more broadly, and I always get to note, Paul advises him in matters personal.

You recall, take a little wine for your stomach's sake. That sort of thing appears in the pastoral. To emphasize the importance of running the church well, Paul, just before 1 Timothy 3.16, this gives you a little bit of context.

And I'm sure you'll recall, if you don't already, he writes in this passage, he writes a well-known, even beautiful description of the church. You recall, it's just before our words in this credo kind of statement that Paul talks about the church as a bulwark, a pillar of the truth.

The church of the living God. Remember that. And then he unleashes these words. The scriptures, the gospel, we should always recall, creates a community which receives them.

That's interesting. I always find it so. There is a receptor community, you might call it. And on the understanding, this is just a footnote, on the understanding of how that dynamic works, turns the whole issue between what we usually call Rome and Geneva.

[10 : 40] Geneva. Geneva. We're an offshoot of Geneva, Canterbury. Just Calvin invented us 500 years ago. But there you go.

Our passage for this church, which is to hold the truth up and to be a bulwark for the truth, our passage looks like it surely is an early creed.

A very early statement of what the church wants to say, if you will. What it is commanded to say in the gospel.

I find it very moving. I am going to get to the passage, I promise. I find a theologian named David Bentley Hart very, very helpful when he says quite seriously that J.S. Bach is the greatest theologian.

He says, Bach's music is a texture, and I'm just quoting my theologian from memory, but surely it's correct. Bach's music, he calls it a texture of ornamentation, of pause, of intensification, of repetition, of answering, of asserting.

[11 : 58] And all of this and more, all of this and more, this is the theologian's point, all of this and more is the music. There is no thing called the music other than all of its ornamentation, all of what elaborates it.

It is its elaboration. We can talk about God in those terms. Our God revealed in the gospel is a father asserting his son.

And the son receiving the father's assertion and the spirit uniting the father and the son. Or the father, there isn't just one picture of this, the father is one who delights in the son's perfect act of reflecting the father back to the father.

And the spirit acts almost as one who frees the father's love in its giving away of itself in another who is his son. The trinity is all of these, this ornamentation, this intensification, this acting and receiving, this delighting.

Such is the way our God is. This is in the tradition closer to us, Jonathan Edwards, quite seriously. Edwards thinks of God as a fugue.

[13 : 23] The trinity is a fugue. Think of how fugue sounds. That's our God, Edwards says. He's like that. A rich music is our God of infinite glory.

Literally infinite. How inadequate is any Christian sensibility which habitually thinks of and habitually speaks of God as, and you sometimes get this in Christian circles and it's a bit annoying if it becomes habitual and it's not elaborated on.

You know, God is sort of the biggest one in the universe. That's horrible. You shouldn't think about God like that. God's not the biggest one in the universe.

God is not a high over against a low. He's an infinite act of distance. He gives meaning to big and small, high and low. We need to strive to learn to say things like that on occasion.

Why bother with such talk? Well, it attempts to create a framework in which to hear, to contemplate, to grow in an understanding, this first great creedal word.

[14 : 39] Again, Paul starts by saying, great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion. Some readings. The Jim Packer Bible quotes I read the other day as, great is the mystery of godliness.

It's the same thing. But here we get to the great first assertion of the creed. We need to hear and contemplate, he was manifest, he was manifested in the flesh.

This is a great creedal assertion here. He, of course, is Jesus. We've lost, a theologian named John Webster says, the use of classical Christian discourse.

We don't know how to speak the faith the way it's been spoken for a long time. I think a creed like this can help us get back to using classical Christian discourse.

There's been, as he did, he calls it a near disappearance of Christian habits of thought and speech from the church's public self-description of itself, says Mr. Webster.

[15 : 47] I think he's right. And reading this kind of high creedal language, I think, helps us to get back to a strong language. It's interesting to note, I think, that, whoops, on our, on your first birthday, each of you, this includes me too, you were manifest in the flesh.

Being manifest in the flesh is not too mysterious. We're all manifest in the flesh. You were once nothing, and now you're something. You came out of something.

We are all what? We're all called out of a nothing into the radiance of this creation. And we are further called into the mystery of knowing the infinite God forever.

Knowing God. Again, I've said it before, someone should write a book with that title. Find someone who writes books.

But, you know, this creed implies within its whole Catholic setting in the church, in the canon, Jesus was not manifest in the flesh out of nothing.

[17 : 04] He was from above. He was, if you will, emptied into the creation. Jesus was emptied into the creation. And then, as the creed ends, we'll get to it in a while, then he went back into a place called glory, taken up in glory.

He was manifest in the flesh, therefore, before he was received into glory. He was vindicated in the spirit, the creed now says.

This seems the most obscure, difficult to contemplate assertion in this creed, I think. The word spirit, you find it so it's always a bit elusive. Persons, groups, organizations, music, everything appears to have spirit, but it's hard to define.

Spirit is not a thing, but it's real. Perhaps the realest thing there is. God is spirit, Jesus says. God is not one thing among other things, or not that is usually pictured in the mind.

In him we live and move and have our being. God is infinite spirit and makes all particular things possible by giving them the gift of existence.

[18 : 18] That's who we are this morning. And we know this, the Bible says. We know we've been given this gift of existence and we repress this knowledge.

Repression then finds expression in accusing God of some kind of injustice about the way things go in his creation.

God is somehow held responsible for the moral condition of the world. But God, in the mystery of Jesus, in his manifestation.

I think we can pause here and say, manifested in the flesh. It really refers to the whole mystery of Jesus in his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension.

In, then again back, in his manifestation, God begins to refute the charges that man makes against him.

[19 : 19] Trying to unfold this moment in the creed with some fullness. He takes this wrath of man, man's propensity to accuse God of being in the wrong, and then he turns it into his triumph.

Or he is, as this creedal moment says, he is vindicated in the spirit. Who is vindicated in the spirit?

Did Jesus need to be vindicated in the spirit? Who's vindicated? There's a richness waiting to be known in this moment in the creed.

It's as if this moment in the creed says something like, the full justification of God is on display and in Jesus.

And this act of justification also justifies mankind in God's presence. That's why the gospel is always called grace.

[20 : 32] He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit. There's a mystery there. I feel inadequate unfolding that.

Vindicated in the spirit. Somehow in the person of Jesus, God vindicates himself, and then he vindicates us in God's presence. That's why it's grace.

But moving right along, seeing by angels comes next in this creed. It seems somehow at first glance a bit arbitrary, almost a bit of a fragment.

Why is this in this creed? The New Testament does tell us that angels desire to understand what is revealed in Jesus in the gospel, doesn't it?

Peter makes that famous assertions. These are things into which angels long to look. Angels were with Jesus in the temptation in the wilderness.

[21 : 34] Angels are everywhere in the scriptures.

Does this confession serve as a statement? I find it beautiful as involving angels. It serves as a kind of statement about the uniting of the visible and invisible worlds, if you will, in Jesus.

He was seen by angels. The heavenly places were somehow involved in the mystery of the gospel. And this creed wants us to know that.

It was seen by angels. It seems to me to be a sober-minded, mature-minded supernaturalist is a Christian demand and a Christian privilege.

I wonder if that's thought enough about in the church. I don't know. We are supernaturalists, aren't we? We're committed to that. There is, we are surrounded by invisible things.

[22 : 45] This morning's sermon especially moved me, being about grace so much. And I thought about, I thought about this room for some reason.

You know when you come in here and you drink coffee, didn't have this prepared, and you look out at these two big windows? I can do a bit of it now. There's a lot of green out there, and where I'm specifically looking, there's a lot of brighter sunshine on the green.

I can see a little hole here, and I can see some blue. Sometimes that's just a mass of green and brightness out there. The paganism that is swamping our culture right now is very much like the ancient world's paganism.

When they look at that, they see brute fact. That is a fact. It's there.

And we are brute facts. We're just here. The biblical answer to that, the biblical view of it, the Christian view of it, and I don't think, I wish I could have a sensibility that was more automatically this way.

[23 : 59] When you look out there, you as a Christian, we as Christians, should say immediately, our whole sensibility, gift. Gift.

That green, that sun on the green, that the Lord is giving me a little glimpse through it. Gift. Gift. Gift.

Gift. I'm a gift. You're a gift. We have our existence by, we're gifts. We've been given. And therefore, we're in the midst of this strange, radiant world.

And we're even told that hither and thither in it all, there are angels. And this should be part of our habitual sensibility, mature sensibility as Christians, not scatterbrained, superstitious people.

In fact, the people who live in a world which is mere brute fact often become superstitious, not Christians. We're told meaningful, rich truth, manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, now seen by angels.

[25 : 22] It's very rich. Then the creed moves along, preached among the nations. This, as opposed to vindicated in the spirit, for instance, appears to me quite straightforward, biblically and theologically.

It invokes, I take it, things like Isaiah, you know, and other prophets. Those uniquely beautiful and lovely passages about Israel, or Israel as or in the suffering servant, preaching salvation in her fullness to the world.

You know, to Abraham, Israel's God had said that through him, Abraham, he would bless the nations. And in Jesus, this great promise of God made to Abraham, reasserted by the prophets, those lovely moments in Isaiah especially, he says, I, Israel, will lift you up in such glory that the nations will flow to you, and you will teach them the way of truth.

It's not the way that the world is not a brute fact, for instance, that it's a gift. That we've learned that through the God of Israel, fulfilling his promises.

Again, to Abraham, he says, I will bless the world through you. The prophet said, there will come a day when, the glory of Israel will be preached among the nations.

[26 : 53] The whole world is going to hear about this. And the creed is now saying that this has happened. Bible always uses rich tenses, sometimes past tenses.

This has been preached among the nations. And hence, it will be believed on in the world must follow. No, Jesus said, if I be lifted up, I will draw all men to me.

That, he meant that, our Lord was thinking about the mystery of his, of how he would bring Israel to her glory. By being lifted up.

He would draw the Gentiles. He was thinking about us here in room 100. He was going to draw Gentiles like ourselves to himself. When Israel was lifted up in her glory.

If I be lifted up, I will draw all to me. And so what's happened? My word will not return to me void or futile, but it shall accomplish what I have sent it for.

[27 : 57] The prophet said on behalf of Israel's God. And in Jesus, that word has been and is being fulfilled today. Throughout the world, Jesus is being lifted up.

He's being preached among the nations. And people, I'm astonishingly, come to believe in this Jewish rabbi who claimed to be Israel's Messiah and would bring Israel to her fulfillment.

And he's done that. And then the creed says, taken up in glory. Taken up in glory.

Again, that seems, perhaps it is, nicely simple, straightforward, a kind of summarizing statement. But I take it, it's a lot richer than we think.

For some reason, this brought the not dimittest to my mind. You know, at Evensong, in the church, we often sing that song from the temple. Lord, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word.

[29 : 00] For mine eyes have seen thy salvation. Mine eyes have seen thy salvation. Which thou has prepared before the face of all people to be a light, to lighten the Gentiles.

That sounds like our creed. And then, and to be the glory of thy people Israel. Israel. There's a scene of salvation in the temple when Jesus' glory was revealed.

Isn't it strange that in the, in the Johannine stuff in the New Testament, especially the gospel, the theme is always that Jesus on the cross was lifted up in glory.

It's sort of a, a continuous action. On the cross, he's in his glory. In his tomb, when he rises from the dead, then he goes back to the Father and the ascension.

There is seeing salvation. I think in the synoptics, it's the transfiguration story is where we see Jesus taken up in glory at one level. I wonder if Paul thought of Jesus as being on display in his glory when he was seen by more than 500 brethren at one time, Paul.

[30 : 12] A throwaway line in one creed. Once our Lord stood before 500 people-ish. Some have never elaborated on, as far as I know, in the rest of the New Testament.

Some have, maybe he's referring to Pentecost. Somehow it seems obscure. No. There's a glory in Jesus being seen by the 500.

But this creed, do you think, at first blush, it seems to be, oh, that must be the ascension. They're thinking about our Lord in the mystery of his return to the Father's right hand, where he'd always been in the Trinitarian mystery.

Taken up in glory. This creed covers a lot of bases, I think, doesn't it? I think we can go further here, at least theologically, and we should.

As he was manifest in the flesh, back at the first assertion, now he takes, he takes our humanity, which he assumed when he was manifest in the flesh, he takes our humanity and he manifests it, if you will, in the heavenly places.

[31 : 27] He was manifest in the flesh. He never really stopped manifesting in the flesh. That's why he rose from the dead in a body. And now he goes back into the heavenly places.

I make these assertions in front of a theologian in one of the early rows here. You've got to be very careful. He takes humanity back into the mystery of God, somehow.

Our faith makes you think, as John Webster says somewhere, makes you think and say things which are quite surprising. And maybe we're a bit embarrassed by them, so we stop talking about them.

But we shouldn't be. We need to learn the classical Christian language again. Maybe our own tradition, a little footnote on the side.

Our own tradition encourages us to talk about ourselves on occasion. Maybe too much. Let me tell you my story. This creed says, let me tell you the story of Jesus.

- [32 : 33] Let me just be a mere mouthpiece about him, not me. He was manifest in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, vindicating God and us, seen by angels, uniting the worlds, fulfilling Israel's mysterious calling to be preached among the nations, causing belief, the mystery of belief to form.

What we owe God is belief. And then bringing all things into a state of glory, taking our humanity and then us up into glory.

Our faith is amazing. It's a drama. It's an amazing drama. It's a bit, it's a bit fanciful, and yet it appears strange to me at least that our history has so unfolded that humanity does attempt to leap into those heavenly places which we may see with our own eyes.

Don't we? The drama of seeking out the moon is now part of our mundane history. And yet, taken up in glory leaves, obviously, our efforts far behind.

Taken up in glory is indeed more like Tolkien's eucatastrophe. A good news unexpected which simply staggers us.

- [34 : 19] I think this creed is a eucatastrophe. You know, this is what happened in Jesus. You know, sometimes the church puts this aside for other treasures, which is our foolishness, isn't it?

This was, this is the treasure of the gospel. This is God's astonishing salvation of us. Unexpected. He had announced it, and yet, when it came true, it staggers us.

I wonder who wrote this creed. Paul wrote it, or a colleague. Or was this sung in early church circles and Paul heard it and said, oh, how lovely, I'll use that. It's a glorious statement.

I think learning this, learning this creed helps us to become faithful in the task of learning how to speak the Christian confession again.

The church, I guess, in the Western world is going to have to learn how to speak her confession again, and it's going to be sort of a martyrdom time. Our confession, we won't argue much more.

- [35 : 27] We're going to confess and we're going to know martyrdom in various forms when we confess this creed in a culture that doesn't like creedal assertion too much.

but I love these, I love these, these, this is a kind of creed that just begs for elaboration, doesn't it? This must have been sung or said in church, in communities of Christians that knew a lot because this, on its surface, this doesn't tell you a lot, it's begging for framework.

There must have been probably an existing framework, often in the communities that said such words. It tells us a lot about the first Christians. I don't think they were indifferent to doctrine at all.

They loved the drama of the gospel and so they said things like, great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our, of our religion, the mystery of God's action for us.

So hence, it could be the mystery of godliness that he was manifested in the flesh. He came out of the glory of heaven to God's good earth and he vindicated God, answered man's accusations against him and vindicated man in the same action.

- [36 : 50] Oh, is that grace to take an accuser and justify them as you answer their accusation. What an amazing vindication.

This was all seen by angels. Angels want to know what we're about and what the gospel is about. Preached among the nations, believed on the world, taken up in glory where we're all going, whether you like it or not.

Taken up in glory. This is, this is, I like the word eucatostris. If you've got a better word, tell me what it is. The staggering arrival of good news.

It's amazing. I don't know how, that's kind of high stuff, breathless stuff. It's like landing on the moon. Neil Armstrong stayed cool and calm up there.

I mean, Dr. Hill knows. How do you, how do you, but we've got a new landing promise, a kind of a new land and a new landing. I just, I like this high credo language.

[37 : 59] It moves me. Some people find it cold. Maybe they, maybe they came from backgrounds where credo assertion was just, didn't mean anything. But once you internalize it, it becomes something I think you begin to love.

Since I mentioned Tolkien, just in closing, I'm just, one of my favorite moments in Tolkien, strictly from memory, is in The Hobbit, the book that precedes the Lord the Rings.

You know, after that ridiculous adventure that Bilbo, the Hobbit in that story has, he gets back and his great mentor and protector in Middle Earth is the angelic-like figure Gandalf.

Bilbo has a tendency to babble on about things mindlessly. He's a good guy. Finally, this angelic fear gets a little bit put off with it. He's got a quick temper.

What if the angels have quick tempers? And Gandalf looks at Bilbo and says, do you think that this whole story was about you? He could have been talking to an evangelical.

[39 : 09] Oh, I'm saved. I'm going to have... That which is okay. I don't mean to be glib about my own tradition, which I love and honor. Oh, I love this language manifested in the flesh.

Maybe we could end by, I'll say a prayer. after we, could we together, very quietly, in a sober minded voice, just say this creed together.

And we could... Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion. And so we say, he was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Amen. Amen. Amen. I'll say, Lord, we thank you for, thank you that you're a teacher. You said that you are our teacher and our Lord.

We confess you as such. And we thank you that you teach us. Teach us to be good students and good speakers out into the world of what you teach us in the mystery of our great godly religion that you've given to us.

[40 : 20] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Just please contemplate a question or two or more.

We've got good time for it. Today at the morning service, we sang that great hymn, To God Be the Glory. And the last verse said, I thought, well, I'll just say the last verse and then that's enough.

Because the last verse says, great things he has taught us, great things he has done, and great our rejoicing through Jesus his son. This is all right from this creed, I think.

But then pure and higher and greater will be our wonder, our rapture when Jesus we see, when we're taken up in the glory that he has already gone before to prepare for us.

So if you go to the 730 service and you sing a good hymn, you don't have to listen that carefully to guys like me. So thank you.

[41 : 17] And please, there must be questions and comments that will be very helpful, I'm sure. I guess the early church was vindicated, speaking of vindication, in doing creeds when it had things like this in front of it.

Mr. Chandler, sir. Is there any danger in dramatizing as this does, for drama's sake?

Is there any danger at all, because we are very good at spoiling things, and making idols and gods of things, like, say, 17th century English language, that's like the thing, which seems to be able to come to other things.

We're the great spoilers, aren't we? Suddenly, we don't want to hear all the language, we'll want to hear it all expressed in this particular way, or in a far way, as you may.

Is there any danger in that holy saint? I hear you. I hear you.

[42 : 51] We don't get enough of it right now, but... By the time the pastoral epistles come along, yeah, this issue is on the church's agenda, isn't it?

So there's issues in the past just of sound words. But I guess the form obviously changes, their form, the feel of them, their tone.

But I hear you, I hear that as a concern. isn't it? It becomes more than the emphasis, priesthood among the nations believe the world, and suddenly you're shouting by the very last line.

I work with that sort of athletic energy that's happening there, which I think is missing in the church. I hear you, that's a concern, isn't it?

it becomes more of a concern, I take it, in a pluralist culture, where how do we make ourselves reasonably heard, with an absolute and extreme, in a sense, claim about Jesus?

[44 : 07] I wonder what it would sound like in June. Oh, like Bach, I suppose. Well, I think that's a great creed.

Well, I'm a Christian, because I'm not going to say it's not a great creed. I mean, it counteracts Bill, I mean, your question deserves an answer.

It counteracts the, as good as it is, the Jesus is my friend tradition of language, it is good, but it becomes, it becomes a bit shabby after a while, doesn't it?

Who is your friend? This tells us who he is. yes, yes? It means it can be very sterile, if it's only a drama, that you made it living, because you've taken time over it, and I suppose that's what meditation is, that you just really start trying to think, unpack it, and it becomes something that's very very living.

It's too easy in church services to just stay on the surface as a priest, instead of just really allowing it to get into our souls.

[45 : 53] Yes, it just so exalts Jesus.

It just so, if he inhabits the praises of Israel, whatever fully such language means in the Psalms, he inhabits this confession confession.

It will be honored by God, this confession. So the sound words at some level are very, are important. Do it right.

Paul is telling Timothy, get these sound words in order, and get them in circulation in the church. We don't want too much mere wandering wandering in our thinking and speaking.

Manifested is a dramatizing word, to take up Bill's point, he was manifest. He was born of the Virgin Mary, is the fact.

[47 : 14] God, this is more the act of God in great mystery, manifesting himself in the person of his son, being there, manifested.

that in Greek, that's pheneros, the phenomenality of God is there. Vindicated in the spirit, does anybody have any further thoughts on that?

I did struggle over that one. I read one commentator, it's just useless. You know, just some puff, puff, puffery.

I always forget, Jim, the name of your translation. It's by the spirit they go with. I don't think it changes anything much the more you ponder these different little connector words.

Vindicated by the spirit. It could be that in the preaching of the gospel among the nations, the spirit will vindicate is there an echo there?

[48 : 25] Vindicated in the spirit. Yeah, I think so. It is a fact that the preposition in, in the New Testament, in, in the Greek, it holds together the ideas of the location, which is all that in tends to convey to our minds, location in some shape or form.

But in the New Testament, links that idea with the thought of agency. Yes, yes. And by the spirit, therefore, is just as good a translation as in the spirit.

Yes, yes. In is the literal word, but by the spirit is certainly the uppermost level of the thought. Yes. thing.

And I suppose that all, well, sorry to say all, and suppose that what the phrase is pointing to is the fact that whatever people were saying about Jesus in the course of his ministry, diminishing it and belittling it and poo-pooing it and treating it as, well, just another weird thing.

You know, Pharisees, Sadducees, people like that who were negative about Jesus' ministry all through. in face of that, the Lord was doing wonders.

[50 : 10] He healed the sick, he fed the crows on these two occasions and finally in the spirit, by the spirit, with the spirit's agency, he rose from the dead, and that was the supreme vindication as against all these belittlers who thought when he was crucified that they'd got rid of him for good.

I suppose that the phrase is pointing to some of those things and perhaps more. I say perhaps more, could I make another point? Please.

That phrase suggests to me, you didn't spend time on the leading and figure.

Not much, no, no. Paul says that the word mystery is one of his key words. It points first and foremost every time he uses it to revelation.

God revealing what hitherto has been his secret. and Paul says that yes, Jesus Christ is revelation from the Father in that sense and the mystery is a great mystery, great in the sense of cosmically momentous and personally momentous.

[51 : 49] and the bottom line there, I think, is that when God tells us his secrets, we can only ever understand the surface level of them, anyone.

There's always more to them, more to God's plan and purpose, more to his ingenuity of working out his will, than ever we see.

so that all through life we keep learning fresh dimensions of the mystery, that is, the revealed reality of Christ and the gospel, of the whole plan of grace, and the way that God is glorifying himself by what he does to save in saving us.

Great is the word that comes at the beginning of the sentence, so that's the word that's being stressed more than any other word in the sentence. Great is the mystery of our religion, and we never get to the end of the greatness.

So the opening sentence, we go like, let's go back to Bach, like a flourish of Bach's trumpets, calling attention to the fact that something very momentous, is just enough to appear.

[53 : 19] And then comes the creed, which is, just as you've said, very, very momentous in the world. vindicated, is vindicated aptly replaced with, say, justified?

Well, the Greek word that's used is the word justified, which, before ever, it took on the technical sense of holding it, did be vindicated against suspicion and false accusation and slounder, lies being told about you, and so on.

it means that something happens which shows that you were in the right and that all your critics were in the wrong.

And that meaning, as I say, was going, that's the older thing, the word again, the form will justify as a technical term. that's the older being here.

Dean, I'm, I'm, please. I had maybe a thought of the use of the word vindicated. I mean, I'll have writing to people who are being persecuted, and there's probably a sense in which these people were tempted maybe to vindicate about themselves.

[54 : 55] So, I mean, you do say Peter was arrested, he was taking up a sword, and, you know, attack the people who are attacking Christ, and then to do this sort of, you know, human attempt to vindicate God.

And so, in saying this, maybe they're saying, no, we have to step back and trust God, and invade, not do that sort of thing.

So, maybe it's a reminder that even though it's called a persecution to not take up the sword, to be so much as God right.

That sounds wonderful to me. I mean, it seems to highlight to me, staying with musical metaphors, there's a polyphony, if that's the right word, of meaning here, that it can just be colored in, it can become that ornamentation that maybe that's why it's so concise, so that it can become the fullness of our faith, is there.

there. But thank you for that, that sounds good. I mean, I don't know if it's a step too far, but again, this morning, our pastor, as in the comfortable words, he changed a bit today, and somehow we found ourselves, or somewhere in the service, we found ourselves reminded of those amazing words, of he became sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God, that although he seems like the rejected one, he seems like the guilty one in Israel, the rejected one, the worst one, the blasphemer, is vindicated in the spirit by his manifestation and resurrection.

[56 : 39] Again, that's, it sure seems to mean a lot, doesn't it, because it's so, I think the sensibility of the Christian needs to be worked at, it no longer is reinforced by our culture, so I come back to the sunshine through the window, and the green, I'm not alive enough to it, it's a gift, it's all gift.

not mere fact. We cannot, it has all sorts of implications, gratitude, a life, we're meant to live lives of gratitude, of care for the world, care for one another as gifts.

John Webster is a good theologian, you can read him, he's good stuff, he's, sheila. I'm tempted to put half of this into the present tense, I realize that wasn't his purpose, and it kind of ruins the symmetry of the past tense which you looked at, but Christ continues to be vindicated by the spirit, it is the spirit that helps us to understand who he is, he continues to be preached among the nations, and he continues to be believed in the world, so it's a challenge as well as an affirmation of faith.

That's good, yeah. And maybe that comes out more, doesn't she, maybe I should have put the, what precedes this, a reminder, Paul is saying, pillar, bulwark, Timothy, take the church seriously, she is doing a task given her by God, and then the creed, this is what the church confesses, so you're right, it's now, Timothy, now, confess this, it's continuous, but there you go, am I the only one, I still remember Neil Armstrong landing, and it moves me, I love that, I'm dating myself, I was just on my mother's knee, of course, she said, this is what's happening, the eagle has landed, I bore you on eagle's wing, that means, is Neil Armstrong a Christian?

I watched it in July, 1969, with particular interest because Buzz Aldrin, who was the second person who came around a little bit, was a one-time student in my class, a pledging assistant professor, he knew more than I did while I was his teacher, but he had a friend, John Lambert, who was a real Christian, a very fine person, he was, unfortunately, had an unfortunate life after that, but certainly he was sympathetic about the mature Neil Armstrong that had been a real thing, and they were exulting what had happened, they were just enjoying the road of God.

[59 : 59] God allows humanity to do this, leaping into the heavenly places as we see them, it was lovely.

Well, I think, you didn't get one amen in here, but I think we're spiritual. a lot. You think so?

It's wonderful to see myself in the text. We confess, preach among the nations, believe God in the world. So that's a part of our history, and it's real for us.

So thanks so much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you all. Thank you.