

THE MYSTERIES OF GODLINESS

1 TIMOTHY 3:16 • TV178A

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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.”

The title of this message today is: **“THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS.”** I will be speaking from **1 Timothy Chapter 3:16.**

If you will, take your Bible and open it to **First Timothy chapter one 3 at verse 16.** I am going to read the text and then make a few remarks by way of introducing the subject and then come back to the text. Keep your Bible open to **1 Timothy 3:16**; this is what Paul says:

“And 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, received up into glory.”

My friends, one of the words that we hear quite frequently in religious conversation, (in preaching and teaching), is the word simple; we hear it all the time. We hear people say things like this; “the simple plan of salvation.”

I have heard others say this; (I heard this just a night or two ago on television), a preacher was talking about the Gospel and he said, “It is very simple, very simple; all you do is believe; it is just that simple.”

Then, we hear other people say, “Well; he preaches a simple Gospel; so simple that a little child can understand it.”

This over simplification of the Gospel has led to four errors. I want you to listen carefully now. I have given a lot of thought to this and I know this is true. You listen to it, this over simplification of the Gospel, “the simple plan of salvation,” “the simple way of life.”

First of all: This position has led many natural men (when I say natural men, I mean unregenerated, unsaved, unbelievers) to believe that they are authorities on the Bible. That’s exactly right!

We have declared that the way of life, that the way to God, the way of salvation is so simple that even a little child can understand it.

So, this has led natural men to believe that they are authorities on the Scripture. They have read a little Bible, they have memorized **John 3:16**, and they have memorized **Psalms 23**. Now, they are authorities on the Word of God.

They will argue with you about Scripture. They will argue with you about doctrine. They will argue with you about the church. They will argue with you about anything because they are authorities on the Bible.

After all, it is so simple that even a natural man can understand it. Yet, God said in **1 Corinthians 2:14**, “*The natural man receiveth not the things of God, they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, they are spiritually understood.*”

He who does not have spiritual life nor the Holy Spirit cannot understand. “*The natural mind is enmity against God. The preaching of the cross is foolishness to them that perish. If our Gospel be hid it is hid to them who are blind,*” blinded by Satan.

We have over simplified this thing and everybody is an authority on the Bible. A man will study to be a doctor for 8 or 10 years. A man will study to be a lawyer for 8 or 10 years. A man will study to be an electrician for 4 or 5 years. He will study for years to be an automobile mechanic but in 5 minutes he is an authority on the Word of God.

Every mother’s son is an authority on the Bible; that is sad. The fault is that we have declared that it is so simple, and that there is nothing to it, and that anybody can understand it.

Secondly: This position has created an unholy familiarity with the holy God. The holy, eternal God has become everybody’s buddy. The holy, eternal God, who inhabits the heaven of heavens, whose footstool is this earth, is everybody’s buddy.

We hear statements like this: “Well, God is my partner or God is my co-pilot, or me and Jesus, we got a good thing going.”

I heard a song not long ago that went like this:

**“Build me a mansion next door to Jesus
And tell the angels I’m a coming home.”**

No fear, no awe, no reverence, no fear of God is before their eyes. After all, it is just so simple, there is nothing to it. In over simplification of the Gospel we have reached up and brought almighty God down to our level.

We have ignored Scripture like this; listen to **Ecclesiastes 5:1 and 2**: *“Keep your foot when you go to the House of God and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools for they consider not that they do evil: Be not rash with your mouth; let not your mouth be hasty to utter anything before God; God is in the heavens; you are upon the earth, therefore, let your words be few. Suffer not your mouth to cause your flesh to sin.”*

Oh yes; we have an unholy familiarity with God. We talk like God is the man next door, our buddy, our co-pilot, our partner and all of these things. We fail to recognize that *“God is in his holy temple; let all the earth bow down and worship him. Holy and reverend is his name.”* But, this simple Gospel has brought God down to our level.

Thirdly: This insistency on the simple plan of salvation has given millions of people a carnal refuge. It has given them a carnal hope in decisions, in experiences, in church membership, in religious ordinances and rituals. It has taken away from them the desire and need to continually seek the Lord, to continually come to Christ, to continually search the Scriptures.

We are just all sure. “Are you saved? I was saved 20 years ago. I have no cause to search the Scriptures; I have no cause to seek the Lord. I have no cause to give diligence to make my calling and election sure. I went to an old fashioned altar; I prayed through, I shook the preacher’s hand.”

“I was baptized; I joined the church. I have been a deacon or a preacher all of these years. Who me, lost? Why, it’s impossible. If anybody makes it Lord, surely I will.”

The Scripture talks about this: *“To whom coming.”* In other words, we continually come to Christ. You are the house of Christ if you *“you hold fast your confidence (profession of faith) firm unto the end.”*

My friend; faith is not an isolated experience. Repentance is not an isolated experience. Faith is a state of being. Repentance is a continual state and condition of the heart. We have repented, we are repenting, and we shall repent. We have sought the Lord, we are seeking the Lord. We shall turn to the Lord. We shall continue to look to Christ.

This simplification of the Gospel has given people a hope, a carnal refuge in a decision, in an experience, in church membership, in baptism, and they say, “I’m all fixed up. I have got it signed, sealed, delivered, and

put away in a safe somewhere, along with my social security, along with my insurance policy, along with my Last Will and Testament and when I need God I will go open the safe and I will get out my experience and we will take off for heaven.”

That is sad because this thing of coming to Christ is a continual coming. Paul tells us all the time; “*Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure,*” said the apostle Peter.

Let me show you something else:

This insistency upon the simple Gospel, this over simplification of “*the mystery of godliness;*” I want you to watch this, it has given religionists the notion that there is nothing profound in the Gospel, there is nothing mysterious in the person and work of Christ.

“There is nothing deep, mysterious, high and rich, in the Gospel of God’s grace,” so we just cast it aside. We cast the Gospel aside as unworthy of our time, unworthy of our thought, unworthy of our study, and unworthy of our preaching.

Like one fellow said one time when asked; “Do you preach the Gospel?” “Everybody knows the Gospel; I preach prophecy.” “Well, don’t you preach Christ and him crucified?” “Everybody knows that; I deal with future events.”

That’s the reason preachers major on prophecy, future events, politics, education, and cleaning up society. They have this idea that the Gospel is simple, and that everybody knows it. There is nothing to study, there is nothing to seek, there’s nothing to learn and grow in.

Do you wonder why so many preachers today on television, radio, and from the pulpit major on prophecy (what’s happening in Israel, what’s happening in Iran, and what’s happening somewhere else). Do you wonder why they major on the programs, education, and politics; I will tell you why!

They see no beauty in the Gospel. They see no glory in the Gospel of Christ. They see no mystery in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, they have turned their attention, they say, “To more important things.”

My friend, the apostle Paul did not share that opinion. When he came to Corinth (Corinth was the city of philosophers, the city of debaters, the city of arguers. It was a place where all these fellows met to examine new thoughts and new ideas), Paul stood before them and said this; “*I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.*”

Paul didn’t come to Corinth with some new philosophy and say, “Well, everybody knows about the crucifixion, everybody knows about the resurrection, now we will go onto more important events.” He said, “*We preach Christ and him crucified. God sent me not to baptize but to preach the Gospel.*”

Then, to the Galatians, what did he say? He said, “*God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Jesus Christ.*” Why, he said to that same church; “*I travail until Christ be formed in you.*”

What did he say to the Colossians? He said, *“Christ in you, that’s the hope of glory.”*

What did he say to the Ephesians? *“I preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.”*

What did he say to the Philippians? *“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”*

My friend, there is nothing greater than the Gospel. There is nothing more important. There is no subject more important than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Everything that God has for men is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

When our Lord gathered His disciples around Him after He had been crucified, buried, and had risen from the grave, He gathered His disciples around Him (He was going back to the Father). He commissioned them and sent them forth to do what?

Did He send them forth to clean up society, to reform the world, to establish a kingdom, to get everybody to go to church on Sunday and those that didn’t go, to put them in stocks? Did He send them to change the parliaments, congress, the senates and to dethrone kings over nations, or to get crusades together to conquer the Holy Land?

What did He send them to do? He said to his disciples; *“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel.”* Now that is your job and that is your commission; *“go and preach the Gospel.”* The apostle Paul said, *“Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel.”*

Then, when Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration; (here is Moses representing the law and Elijah representing the prophets). On top of that mountain, before the eyes of Peter, James, and John, our Lord was transfigured; He was glorified.

His face radiated the glory of God, even his clothes glistened white. Moses and Elijah appeared with Him, (Elijah representing the prophets, and Moses the Law), and they talked. What did they talk about?

Well, they must have talked about the Millennium or the battle of Armageddon or something important like that, you know. What did they talk about? The Scripture says that they talked about the sufferings which He would accomplish at Jerusalem to redeem His people.

When Christ the Messiah, Moses and Elijah meet together in that summit meeting, on the Mount of Transfiguration, they talked about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I will tell you; listen to this in **1 Peter 1:10 and 12**; Peter talked about the prophets of old. We are talking about Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Elijah, Isaiah, and all these prophets of old. He talked about them inquiring and searching diligently into what?

You read **1 Peter Chapter 1:10**, *“into the sufferings of Christ.”* That is what they inquired and searched diligently into, *“into the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.”* Then, **verse 12** says; *“And the angels desire to look into these things.”*

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There is nothing so great, there is nothing so rich, there is nothing so glorious, and there is nothing so beautiful and so important as the person and work of Jesus Christ.

I will say this; a man who does not spend his time preaching it, and who is taken up with other things (majoring on minors), has not himself seen the beauty and glory of Christ, because **John 12:41** says; “*When Isaiah saw his glory he spake of him,*” of Christ. Paul saw his glory and he preached Christ.

I want to show you several words (isolated, individual words) from the Word of God, which describes this so-called “simple Gospel.” Listen to some words:

First of all: **In Ephesians 3:8**, Paul says; “*Unto me who am less than the least of all the saints is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles, the unsearchable riches of Christ.*” The what, “the simple plan of salvation?” No, “*That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ.*”

Do you know what Job said about this? He said, “*Can you by searching find out God?*” You can find out your idols and your ideas of God and your opinions of God. We are talking about the living God, the high and holy God, the eternal God, the God of creation and providence.

“*Can you by searching find out God? Can you find out the Almighty to perfection?*” Listen, “*It is as high as the heavens, what can you do? It is deeper than hell, what can you know?*”

The next time someone says, “Well, there’s nothing to it, it’s as easy as simple as a-b-c you know, all have sinned, believe on Jesus and confess him. There is nothing to this thing of salvation. There is nothing to this thing, the person and work of Christ. “*It is as high as the heavens, what can you know? It is deeper than hell, what can you do?*”

Listen to Paul in **Romans 11:33**; “*O the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out.*” They are unsearchable!

You can spend a lifetime, spend a millennium, spend 20 millenniums on the person and work of Jesus Christ and you will just touch the hem of the garment.

Listen to this word in **2nd Corinthians 9:15**; “Thanks be unto God for his simple gift.” That is not what that says, it says; “*Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.*” It is talking about Christ, His unsearchable, unspeakable gift. Does that sound simple? Does that sound like first grade work?

You know, when Paul was taken up to the third heaven, he said; “*I knew a man whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know.*” It is over in **2nd Corinthians 12**; he said, “*Who was caught up in the third heaven and saw things that when he came back it wasn’t possible to put them into words.*”

In other words, Paul said; “*When I went into the presence of God, out into the third heaven, I saw unspeakable things,*” unspeakable.

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We are talking about the same thing here in reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. I see this to be true in regard to God's eternal love for sinners. Do you know anything about God's eternal love for sinners and why He loved them, how He loved them? You can spend a hundred years just talking about God's love:

**“Could we with ink the ocean fill?
And were the skies of parchment made
Were every stalk on earth a quill
And every man a scribe by trade.**

**To write the love of God above
Would drain that ocean dry
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
Though stretched from sky to sky.”**

Just the love of God, just one subject in reference to Christ's coming.

What about his divine election? He chose some; the Scripture says that He did. *“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.”*

What about spending a lifetime looking into and studying why God was pleased to take upon Him the seed of Abraham and not the nature of angels?”

Why did he choose Israel and pass by the Egyptians? Why did he choose you and pass by someone else?

What about the incarnation of Christ? The Word was manifest in the flesh. Have you studied that, have you looked into the treasures of the Word? He who made woman was made of a woman.

The Ancient of Days became an infant of days. Do you mean that He who made the rivers, said *“I thirst”* and He who planted the trees, hung on one of those trees?

He that wrote the law became subject to it. Do you understand those things? “They are simple,” someone told me.

What about Christ's obedience to the law? What about His going through the trials of life? What about His being tempted of Satan? God using Satan to tempt the Christ of God, you go and figure that one out.

What about God in human flesh hanging on a tree between two thieves or God the Father turning his back on God the Son? Martin Luther said; “God forsaking God? No man can understand that!” But they tell me, “It is simple.”

The resurrection of the dead; dead men made alive. Men who have lain in the tomb for years come forth in a spiritual body, in an immortal body, a body that does not depend upon food, upon drink, or upon sleep or rest, but a body that is a quickening spirit and lives forever. Christ said, *“At the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must*

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put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” We will be raised in these self, same bodies, spiritual bodies though.

His ascension to heaven and the fact that right now on God’s right hand there is a man called Christ Jesus. My friends; there is nothing simple about this. By the merit and sacrifice of Jesus Christ; Paul says, “*will present you;* (think about this work; the merit and sacrifice of Jesus Christ will one day present you and me) “*holy, unblameable, unproveable, in God’s sight.*”

You think about that for a moment. We are sinners by birth, we are sinners by choice, and we are sinners by nature. Can you fathom the depth of this glorious truth that through Jesus Christ’s own blood and Jesus Christ’s own righteousness and obedience, this sinner right here, stands now before God “*unblameable;*” that is unsearchable?

This sinner stands before God unproveable, justified, white, pure, clean, holy, without sin, just as sinless as God’s own Son, for “with his spotless garments on I am as sinless as God’s own Son.” You figure that out; that is unspeakable, that is unsearchable, and that is not simple! It takes the blood of God to cleanse a guilty soul. It takes the righteousness of God to make us holy.

What about this word, His unchangeable priesthood? Everything I know changes:

**“Change and decay
In all around I see
O thou who changeth not abide with me.”**

Unchangeable is the priesthood of Christ. Unchangeable is the love of Christ. Unchangeable is the person of Christ. “*He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. I am the Lord; I change not.*” He is unchangeable.

Or maybe, these words, “*he shall burn the chaff with fire unquenchable.*” When I think of the word simple I know that we preach the simplicity of Christ; that is the oneness of Christ and the singleness of Christ and the one way of redemption by Christ.

That singleness of Christ, person of Christ, oneness of Christ, and one way of Christ, is anything in this world but simple. It is as profound as the very wisdom of God Almighty.

Now you add to all that I have said, the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy in **1 Timothy 3:16**, in which he says, “*without controversy,* (without doubt, without argument, without room for argument or indifference, without doubt), *great,* (monumental), *is the mystery,* (not the simple) *of godliness,*” the mystery of redemption, the mystery of the salvation of sinners.

This is not the first time that he has used the word “*mystery.*” Paul uses it frequently; it is not the first time that we encounter this word in reference to God’s grace. In **Colossians 1:27**; listen to this’ “*To whom God would make known which is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles which is Christ in you*

the hope of glory. This is a mystery, Christ in you the hope of glory. **Ephesians 5:32** says, “*This is a great mystery. I speak concerning Christ and the church.*”

Ephesians 3:4; “*When you read you may understand my knowledge of the mystery of Christ.*”

In **1 Corinthians 15:51** it says, “*Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep but we shall be changed.*”

I want to take this and I am not rattling the chains of denominationalism. I’m not dusting off the bones of dry doctrine. I’m not feeding curious minds with prophecy and future events. I’m not enforcing rules and regulations for a bunch of self-satisfied, egotistical Pharisees; this is living truth for dying men.

This is grace for guilty men. This is mercy for miserable men. This is hope for hopeless men. This is true; “*Great is the mystery of godliness.*” You can spend a few millenniums here. “*God was manifest in the flesh;*” God became a man.

Here is what we are saying; let it be loud and clear: We are saying that “*the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*” John clearly says, “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God and all things were made by him.*” That Word, “*who made all things, (who created all things, in whom all things live and move and have their being) was made flesh and dwelt among us.*”

God became a man. “*Thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall save his people from their sins,*” which is a fulfillment of the writings of the prophet Isaiah when he said, “*behold, the Lord himself will give you a sign, a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name Immanuel (God with us).*” He said, “*I and my father are one.*”

Second, “*He was justified in the Spirit.*” What does that mean? That means that Christ, His person and work, was vindicated by the Holy Spirit and the word of God.

The claims of Jesus Christ, (now listen to me), the claims of Jesus Christ only demand my attention as they are supported or vindicated by the Spirit of God and the word of God. Christ said that Himself, He said; “*If I bare witness of myself, my witness is not true. The Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. For the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.*”

The prophets bear witness of Him, and the Scriptures bear witness of Him and when the Holy Spirit is come, “*he shall not speak of himself but he will glorify me. He shall take the things of mine and show them to you.*” Christ was vindicated by the Holy Spirit;

Third, “*seen of the angels,*” this is a mystery.

Let me ask you a question. Can you name any religious person or any religious event which in the history of men has commanded the attention or announcement of an angel? Not one; yet our Lord Jesus Christ, His

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whole life, from His announcement of His birth to Joseph, Mary, and to the shepherds, to His ascension on the Mount of Olives, was attended by angels; everything was announced by the angels.

Fourth, He was “*preached to the Gentiles.*” Is this a miracle? There was only one thing lower than a Gentile to a Jew and that was a dog but He is preached to the Gentiles.

Fifth, “*believed on in the world and received up into glory!*”