

THE THEOLOGY OF CHRISTMAS  
1 Timothy 3:16

Intro: I do not think that I have ever heard a Christmas message based upon 1 Timothy 3:16. And I do not remember that I have ever used this text on Christmas Sunday, the Sunday before Christmas. Usually pastors go to the historical accounts of the birth of Christ in Matthew or Luke (and there certainly is nothing wrong with that--those passages can never be exhausted). But I am really surprised that I have never used this verse before, which begins, "God was manifest in the flesh," or, as the most reliable MSS have it, "he who was manifest in the flesh"--but clearly pointing nevertheless to CHRIST.

One thing that makes this text especially interesting and instructive is that it relates the birth of Christ to the ascension of Christ, and to all of the major events of His life which were in between those two events. We can see that Paul was not only thinking about the birth of Christ and of His return to heaven, but of His perfect life,  
His death on the cross,  
His resurrection from the dead,  
and then the fact that He was "received up into glory."

In my younger days I was in a situation where pastors were inclined to argue about what was the most important, the birth of Christ, or the death of Christ. Although I was not involved in the debate, I came to the conclusion long ago that such an argument should be avoided because you cannot separate them. They stand together. The birth of Christ loses its significance without His death, and, in the same way, His death means no more than the death of any other man if He were not, as the Scriptures teach, the virgin-born Son of God.

Thus, in 1 Timothy 3:16 where these great events are brought together, and related to those other great events of our Lord's life here on earth, we have THE THEOLOGY OF CHRISTMAS.

Two things of interest should be noted about this verse.

First, it is thought that this probably was the earliest Christian creed, or statement of faith, concerning Christ. Throughout history there have been many attempts to systematize the teaching of Scripture into formal doctrinal statements, but the important thing about this one is that this was given to us by Paul through the Holy Spirit. So this is a divinely inspired statement of theology concerning Christ.

Second, it is also possible that this was an early Christian hymn. As such it teaches us that hymns were written to give expression to the great doctrines of Scripture.

Paul was writing to Timothy who was probably in Ephesus (according to 1 Tim. 1:3), and it was to the Ephesian church that Paul wrote about hymns. (Also to the Colossian church.) Thus we have an idea as to what they did in the early church as far as singing was concerned.

Ignatius of Antioch, who was thought to be a disciple of the Apostle John, was thrown to the lions in Rome five days before Christmas in the year 107 A.D. because he refused to offer sacrifices to the gods when the Emperor Trajan came to Antioch in that same year. Ignatius considered this "the highest seat of honor" (Schaff, Vol. II, p. 48)--to lay down his life for His Lord.

But Ignatius wrote to the Ephesians on one occasion, and said this:

Do ye each and all of you form yourselves into a chorus, that being harmonious in concord, and taking the key-note of God, ye may in unison sing with one voice through Jesus Christ unto the Father (quoted in Gurney's commentary on 1 Timothy, p. 165).

Thus we see how important this text was in the early church, and that it was common to link theology with singing--something which the church desperately needs to do today.

But there is another thing that I want you to note about this text.

Just as Paul did not isolate the doctrines of Scripture from each other (because this is what theology is: doctrine), so neither did he isolate doctrine from life. In our text Paul related doctrine to "godliness."

What did he mean by "godliness"?

Literally this word means to worship well. It speaks of being devoted to God--really, of being very devoted to Him and of worshipping Him the way He should be worshipped. It speaks of a person who has been brought into a true, vital relationship with God through Christ, who desires above all else to please Him. It is one whose relationship to God manifests itself not only in spiritual worship, but also in a holy life--because these two cannot be separated.

Have you noticed that "godliness" is a key word of the pastoral Epistles--1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus?

In Paul's writings it appears first in these later letters. It is not only used in its form as a subject, but also as a verb, and as an adjective. Note the following verses: 1 Tim. 2:2; 4:7, 8; 5:4 (verb); 6:3, 5, 6, 11; 2 Tim. 3:5; Tit. 1:1.

The only other books where this word is used in some form are Acts and 2 Peter.

Now notice another word: the word "mystery." What does this mean?

A mystery is a revelation made in the NT which had not been made known before in Scripture. Cf. Eph. 3:3, 5.

It may have to do with some truth which was revealed partially before, but with the revelation of the mystery, or that which God had previously kept as an unrevealed secret, the revelation was complete.

"Godliness" was not something new in Scripture. The Lord had encouraged "godliness" from Genesis 1 on. BUT--with the coming of Christ, the revelation as to how men are to be rightly related to God, and how they can then live so as to worship God in a right way and live for His glory, that revelation was complete. Nothing more needs to be said. AND THE OBVIOUS MEANING OF OUR TEXT IS THAT A GODLY LIFE AND GODLY WORSHIP ARE ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE APART FROM CHRIST, HIS PERSON AND HIS WORK.

In fact, Paul was telling Timothy here that this was the reason for Christ's coming: to make it possible for His people to live and worship in a godly manner. Thus here, as in so many other places, Paul taught that an integral part of theology is the life which God through the truth produces in our lives. And that truth has to do with CHRIST!

Now let us look at the details. There are six statements in this verse, and they all have to do with CHRIST. And they all have to do with GODLINESS. If you want to worship God well and to live a godly life, then learn of CHRIST.

#### I. "GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH."

Or, He Who was manifest in the flesh, an obvious reference to the Incarnation of Christ.

This means (1) that He existed prior to His birth,  
 (2) that He did not cease to be what He had been when He became a man,  
 (3) that it was obvious during the days of His life on earth that He was the eternal, sinless, Son of the living God.

And, the fact that He became "flesh," became a man, indicates that His purpose in coming was to restore fallen men to a place of acceptance with God since it all has to do with GODLINESS!

This is like the Apostle John said at the conclusion of his

first Epistle:

And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life (1 John 5:20).

This is the message of Christmas. This is the foundation of all true theology. This is the means and message of godliness.

## II. "JUSTIFIED IN THE SPIRIT."

In what sense was the Lord Jesus justified? Certainly not as you and I are who are in Christ! No, He was "justified in the Spirit" because He was declared to be the absolutely righteous One by the Spirit.

Have you ever considered the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit during the time that Christ was on earth?

Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Christ was anointed by the Holy Spirit for His ministry. Christ was led into temptation by the Holy Spirit to show that He was the true Son of God. He did His work in the power of the Spirit. He was raised from the dead by the Spirit. And the Spirit of God from that day until this continues to bear witness to Christ, and to glorify Him.

In all of these ways the Spirit of God confirms that Jesus Christ was indeed the Person He claimed to be, and that "godliness" is only possible through Him.

THE HOLY SPIRIT NEVER HAS DONE FOR ANY OTHER PERSON WHAT HE DID, AND CONTINUES TO DO, FOR THE LORD JESUS CHRIST!

## III. "SEEN OF ANGELS."

Who announced the birth of Jesus Christ to the shepherds? It was angels. Who was it who gave the first witness to our Lord's disciples that He was raised from the dead? It was an angel?

Paul was indicating here that it was angels who first saw the Lord Jesus raised from the dead. They probably witnessed the actual resurrection!

The elect angels have always stood for the truth, and they, like the Holy Spirit, would have had nothing to do with that which was not true. Angels combine their testimony with that of the Spirit of God in declaring that Christ has

to be a Saviour (with all that that means), and they have never, and will never, give such testimony to any other! They saw Him at His birth, at His death, at His resurrection, and they predicted His return!

— IV. "PREACHED UNTO THE GENTILES."

This became the great issue in the early Church. But it indicates that "godliness" was not for the Jews only, but also for the Gentiles.

There were Gentiles saved in OT times. While the Lord was here on earth, He ministered to the Syrophenician woman, and to the woman of Samaria. But it was not until Peter went to the house of Cornelius that it was apparent that a world-wide ministry to the Gentiles had begun--and it continues to this day.

How thankful we should be for this! "Godliness" through Christ has been by divine authority preached to Gentiles throughout the world.

But that could have been in vain if Paul could not have written:

V. "BELIEVED ON IN THE WORLD."

The message was not only preached, but it was received. This is not for the glory of the Gentiles, but to the glory of God. Read the first three chapters of Romans and you will see that the faith of the Gentiles was evidence of the victory of Christ. No man seeks for God of himself. No man, Jew or Gentile, is interested in "godliness" in and of himself. **WHENEVER YOU READ IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, OR IN THE BOOK OF ACTS, AS YOU DO OVER AND OVER AGAIN, THAT THIS PERSON AND THAT BELIEVED IN CHRIST, MARK IT DOWN TO THE VICTORIOUS GRACE OF OUR GOD!**

And how it needs to be proclaimed today--"that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"--a life which manifests itself in "godliness."

VI. "RECEIVED UP INTO GLORY."

"Received" by whom?

While the Lord was here on earth He told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of righteousness "because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more."

This is the climax of all that is stated here, of all that has to do with the earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He died, but He did not remain in the grave. He arose, but He did not remain on earth. He ascended back to the Father, and He was "received up into glory," showing the Father's pleasure with and acceptance of all that Jesus Christ did when He was here on earth. And the writer of the book of Hebrews has told us in chapter 1 that such an honor was never given even to angels!

Concl: Do we not grieve every Christmas that millions celebrate the birth of Christ without really knowing anything about it, or about Him? Many of the carols convey the message. Here and there we see various passages of Scripture quoted. And what could be clearer than the great themes of Handel's Messiah which is sung in many, many places (or excerpts from it) throughout the Christmas season? And yet still people go on in their blindness, and in their sin!

What is lacking?

Before I answer let me assure you that I have no doubt but that the purposes of God in sending His Son to the earth almost 2,000 years ago are being accomplished. God's work is always on schedule. We can be sure of that. A sovereign God cannot and will not fail.

But He has chosen to work primarily through the lives of His people. That is apparent in the OT and in the NT. And it is the purpose of God that the singing of Christian hymns, and even the reading of the Scriptures, should be served to the people of the world by the people of God whose distinguishing characteristic is that undeniable evidence that Christ lives and reigns. What is it? "GODLINESS"!

The great confirming evidence that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, that He died and rose again, that He ascended back to the Father--all for the salvation of sinners, and all that ungodly sinners might become godly--is that God has a people in every generation who know Him through that Christ, who love Him, who are accepted by Him, and who live for His glory. As the world sees more godliness among those of us who claim to know Christ, then and only then will they be able to see what really was happening when Christ was born in Bethlehem.

Are you trusting in Him? Do you know that the only way to God is through Christ? What the Bible teaches about Christ is the theology of Christmas. He was born to be the Saviour of men. And those whom He saves have perfect acceptance with God, and give evidence of that acceptance by the godly lives they live. If you have never believed in Christ, may God enable you to do so today!

"HIS NAME"  
Isaiah 9:6, 7

Intro: Names convey certain thoughts to our minds. When a person's name is mentioned in our presence, immediately our minds go to work.

Politicians talk about "name familiarity." They want people to know their names, and to feel that they are qualified for the office they seek. Nothing suits an entertainer more than for people to know his name.

We remember people by their names. Names suggest character-- either bad or good. If a person is mentioned whom we do not know, the name really means nothing. But when we do know that person, the very mention of the name portrays character.

What we are determines what people think about us when they hear our names. Solomon said, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches . . ." (Prov. 22:1a). Ecc. 7:1 say, "A good name is better than precious ointment . . ." It is written of David in 1 Sam. 18:30 "that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul; so that his name was much set by," meaning it was precious, or highly esteemed. David had made a name among the servants of Saul.

Joseph had a good name in Old Testament times. And so did Daniel. Much is made of names in both the OT and the NT. Timothy had a good name as far as Paul was concerned; Demas did not! John Mark spoiled his name with Paul, but afterwards made it right.

Names are extremely important.

There is no person mentioned in the Bible about whom more is said with respect to names than our Lord Jesus Christ. His names were God-given, indicating what He was, what He was to do, and/or what He always would be.

Usually His name is spoken of in the singular, even though, as in our text, there were actually four names! But He can lay claim to all of them at one time.

Just this afternoon I heard Dr. Johnson on radio reading from Matt. 1 where the angel of the Lord said about the Lord,

. . . and thou shalt call his name JESUS:  
for he shall save his people from their sins.

But then two verses later, in v. 23, Matthew quoted from Isa. 7:14 which says,

. . . and they shall call his name Emmanuel,  
which being interpreted is, God with us.

He was called Jesus, but He was never called Emmanuel. But both

are His Name.

In the same way, Isa. 9:6 gives us no less than four names of the Messiah, of our Lord, but they are called "his name." This means that He is all of these at the same time. If the Lord Jesus were to write out His full Name, He would be quite some time in doing it. He is the Bread, the Resurrection and the Life, the True Vine, etc. One of the richest studies in the Word of God has to do with the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. His Name indicates what He is.

In our text we have a fourfold part of His Name. This is not His full Name, but is a very important and very interesting part of it.

Let us note, first of all, what His Name is.

#### I. "HIS NAME."

It is, "WONDERFUL COUNSELLOR, THE MIGHTY GOD, THE EVERLASTING FATHER, THE PRINCE OF PEACE."

It is generally agreed that "Wonderful" and "Counsellor" belong together.

#### II. THE EMPHASIS IN EACH PART OF THE NAME.

A. As a Wonderful Counsellor, we see His prudence.

B. As a Mighty God, we see His power.

C. As an Everlasting Father, we see His pity.

D. As the Prince of peace, we see His peace.

The first shows His skill in ordering our lives.  
The second shows His sovereignty over our lives.  
The third shows His sufficiency in our lives.  
The fourth shows His security for our lives.

As the first, the Lord gives guidance.  
As the second, the Lord gives strength.  
As the third, the Lord gives encouragement.  
As the fourth, the Lord gives quietness and rest.

These also reflect what God sees in the hearts of His people:

The first shows our ignorance.  
The second shows our helplessness.  
The third shows our foolishness.  
The fourth shows our anxiety.

As the first, the Lord plans for us.



As the second, the Lord protects us from without.  
As the third, the Lord provides for us.  
As the fourth, the Lord preserves us from within.

Now let us take each one of these terms and see . . .

### III. THEIR CONFIRMATION FROM SCRIPTURE.

#### A. "Wonderful Counsellor."

The Lord plans for us.

Where is this more apparent than in the life of Joseph in the latter part of Genesis?

We see it also in the life of David.

No time is wasted. No experience is unnecessary. And all is working toward the fulfillment of God's infinitely wise plan.

#### B. "The Mighty God."

Here we can think of David. How did he go against Goliath?

Cf. Isa. 40:31.

How did Paul deal with his thorn in the flesh? It was according to what God told him. There is no question but that God was mighty enough to remove it. However, the power of God was never more manifest than for him to bear it with rejoicing.

#### C. "The Everlasting Father."

He is the Father of eternity, and for eternity. Oh, the tenderness of Christ! Cf. Psa. 103:13.

He will provide for us all through time, and all through eternity. He alone is sufficient. Notice how the various parts of our Lord's "name" are interrelated.

#### D. "The Prince of peace."

As "The Prince" He is all we need for the preservation of our peace. Cf. Matt. 11:28-30; John 14:27; 16:33.

Elihu said to Job, "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?" (Job 34:29a).

Concl: The "name" of our Lord has its Messianic significance, but we need also to look at its meaning for us today.