

GOD MANIFESTED IN HUMAN FLESH

1 Timothy 3:16

Intro: It seems like every year at this time those who don't want us to believe anything about God, except perhaps that He doesn't even exist, raise their voices in opposition to the word Christmas, because they don't want to have anything to do with Christ either. But this year there have been encouraging signs that those of us who believe in God, and in Christ, and in the truth of the Gospel, are being heard. Not everybody, of course, who wants to preserve the word "Christmas," or the greeting, "Merry Christmas," is a Christian. But you probably heard about the Mayor of Denver trying to expand this holiday beyond what we as a nation have done in the past, decided that Denver would change "Merry Christmas" to "Happy Holidays. But there was such an uproar from the citizens of Denver, that he had to change it back to "Merry Christmas." To me, that is encouraging.

But those of us who know the true story of the birth of Christ, which is found in the Bible, are thankful for a season of the year when we can talk and think and rejoice in the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. This is what is extremely important. One of our men told us in our men's prayer meeting yesterday morning that last night he and his extended family were getting together, and one thing they planned to do was to recite together Luke 2:8-14, the account of the angel of the Lord appearing to the shepherds and announcing to them that unto them "is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." There never has been a more wonderful message given to anyone than the message contained in those words. That is not a fairy tale. That is a fact of history. And it announced the beginning of the most important events that have ever taken place in the history of the world – the life, the ministry of teaching and miracles, the suffering and death of the Son of God, which was followed by His bodily resurrection from the dead, and then His ascension back to His Father in heaven. And I am sure that those parents and Sunday School teachers who have caused their children to memorize Luke 2:8-14, are in for special rewards when they stand before the judgment seat of Christ. That applies to many other passages which have been memorized which give us the truth of the Gospel. Jesus Christ was born to be our Savior. In order to be our Savior He had to become a Man. And He did this without ceasing to be the Son of God. But He did not save any of us by His birth, or by His perfect life (although it is very

important to know not only that He never sinned, but that He could not sin). To be our Savior He came to die as a sacrifice for our sins, that we who put our trust in Him would not have to spend eternity in hell, but that we might be forgiven and receive the gift of eternal life. We are going to be with God and with Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit forever. *But we would have none of this if Jesus Christ had not been born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem approximately 2,000 years ago. If the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, had not come, there would be no such gift for us as eternal life. We would all have to face a holy God and accept eternal judgment for our sins.*

But let me add: *There is no other way to God. There is no other Savior.* And we need to give this warning to everyone who does not want to hear what the Bible says about God, and about sin, and about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, a warning which the Apostle Peter issued to the Jewish high priest and a group of Jewish religious leaders to explain how they were able to heal a man who was over forty years old, and had never walked. Peter and John had been arrested for doing this. How did Peter answer his accusers? Let me read to you what he said. You will find it in the book of Acts in the Bible, chapter 4, beginning with verse 8:

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,

9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;

10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:8-12).

Let me repeat that last verse. (Repeat v.12.) You can't make yourself acceptable to God regardless of what you do, or regardless of the promises you make to Him. I can't save you. No church can save you. Allah can't save you. Buddha can't save you. There never has been and never will be but one Savior. His Name is the Lord Jesus Christ. Our sins are so terrible and so unforgivable, that God sent His Son "to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). He was born to be the One and Only Savior from sin. He took the penalty that we should have had, that we

might be forgiven and saved from the judgment of God.

This why the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ is so important. His birth was the beginning of His path that led to death, and His death led to His resurrection because He had put away our sins by His own infinitely important sacrifice.

Now in these Sunday morning services I have selected just five verses or short passages, in which we see the results and/or learn some lessons, that could not possibly have taken place if God had not sent His Son into the world to become a human being.

This morning I want to consider with you briefly the last verse of the third chapter of 1 Timothy. This is a verse well worth memorizing. If you haven't memorized it already, I hope you will after we learn what we can this morning about it.

I can imagine that out of Paul's epistles, he considered this epistle to Timothy, along with his letter to Titus, and his second epistle to Timothy, among his most important epistles, and for this reason. He knew that he was approaching the end of his ministry. He is very clear about that in his second letter to Timothy. It was another prison epistle. He realized that the future of the church, the body of Christ, was, humanly speaking, in the hands of men like Timothy and Titus who would minister after he was in heaven. And he wanted them to have a clear understanding of the work that they all were called to do. Time, even hundreds or even thousands of years, do not change the ministry. The current idea today among many who profess to be the Lord's servants, is that the church needs to change in order to keep pace with the world. It is the thought that today's church has to be different from yesterday's church, and that tomorrow's church will bring about more changes. *But nothing could be farther from the truth of Scripture. What Paul preached is what we need to preach. The way Paul lived is the way we need to live. On the other hand, every step that the church takes to make herself like the world, weakens the church, and really causes the church to lose its influence in the world.* And so Paul wrote to these men to emphasize with them what I am sure they had talked about many, many times. The one place they needed to change was in the godliness of their lives. Paul used the words "godly" and godliness" more in these epistles, the pastoral epistles, than he did in any of his other writings. It is not that he was less interested in the godliness of the churches to which he wrote, but that he was deeply concerned that the

leadership of the church pursue godliness, not the approval of the world.

This is a verse all about Christ. In the best MSS “God” does not appear in the verse. The best text seems to be simply “He Who was manifest in the flesh.” But it is very clear that the statements made here could only refer to Christ, that somewhere along the line some scribe may have put “God” in the margin, and it found its way into the received text. And in doing that we can see from the rest of the language that the verse not only refers to Christ, but to the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ! And it is the words, “manifest in the flesh” that brings this verse into the other verses of the Bible which speak of the Deity of our Lord. From John 1 we know that “the Word was God”!

But now let me back up one step to comment on the way the verse begins. Notice that it begins with a simple, but very important, statement:

I. “AND WITHOUT CONTROVERSY GREAT IS THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS.”

Let me begin with the word “godliness”? What did Paul mean by the word “godliness,” and its companion word, “godly”? It speaks of being pleasing to God. Worship is often attached to this word. But while it speaks of pleasing God in our relationship to Him, yet it also includes pleasing God in our relationships with people. That is different from just seeking to please people. We are to seek to please *God* in our relationship to Him, and to do His will in our relationships with each other as well as with the Lord. Ultimately the purpose we should have in being “godly” is to become more and more like God is.

Nothing is more important for a pastor, elder, or deacon to understand for their own good, but also because the shepherds of the flock are to be examples to the flock. The epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus should be required study for every person in leadership in the church so that it will be the pattern for all of the Lord’s people to follow. We are all called to be godly.

Now when Paul said “without controversy,” he meant no one who is truly saved is going to argue about the greatness, the supreme importance, for all of the people of God, that godliness has.

But you will notice here that he speaks about “the mystery of godliness.”

Because of the meaning we attach to the word “mystery,” we are inclined to feel, yes, godliness, and how to be godly in all conditions, is a great mystery. But it is not that kind of a mystery. I hope you remember that I have pointed out many times that the word “mystery,” especially in the NT, does not mean something that is difficult to understand, but it means something that was not revealed previously in the way that it is now made known. The coming of Christ into the world, made it possible for us to understand “godliness” in a way that was not possible before He came. I don’t mean by that, that OT saints were not godly. Many of them shame us because of their great love for the Lord and their desire to please Him. In our Bible reading just now we are reading the book of Daniel. Who among us can compare with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in their devotion to the Lord? But they did not understand the truth as it has now been completed in the NT because Christ has not yet come.

But now “the mystery,” *the secret*, is fully revealed for us in our NTs. And it is “great”! It is tremendously important, and by it we are enabled to rise to even greater heights because of the coming of our Savior. So this verse, 1 Timothy 3:16, gives us “the mystery of godliness.”

Following this statement we have six statements, and all of them refer to God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. So here we have:

II. “THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS.”

What is the first statement?

A. “God,” or “He Who was manifest in the flesh.”

Now I know that none of you have ever given or received a birth announcement like this. Since Grace Elizabeth Frame is the newest member of our church family, let me use her as an illustration. Steve and Mary, her parents, sent out a birth announcement to tell us of her arrival, but it did not say that “Grace Elizabeth ‘was manifest in the flesh.’” It told us that she was born on October 13, 2004, at 10:20 a.m., and that she weighed 8 pounds and 14 ounces. But they did not say that she “was manifest in the flesh.” Why? Because the words “manifest in the flesh” imply a previous existence. We know where the Lord was born. We don’t know the date, and we don’t know how much He weighed. What we do know was that He “was manifest in the flesh.” The baby Jesus was the eternal Son of God Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the

virgin Mary. His conception did not mark the beginning of His life. He had no beginning. He is eternal. But at the time of His birth we have the Son of God revealed in human flesh. He was both God and a true human being. As Paul said in Romans 8:3. “God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,” but not in sinful flesh. He was morally perfect, totally without sin, even without the ability to sin. And since Jesus Christ and God the Father are one, we know that Jesus Christ was Deity, was God, and so His birth was a manifestation, a revelation, in a body which could be seen and touched and loved. True, He was born, as the angels said, but His birth was totally different from any other birth. His was a birth of God Who had become Man.

What else did Paul say about Him?

B. “Justified in the Spirit.”

This does not mean that He had to be justified like you and I are by faith in the Lord Jesus. It means that the Holy Spirit, by Whom the baby Jesus was conceived, and Who had a major part in our Lord’s life from the time of His baptism until His death, by His very part in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, *was declaring that Jesus Christ was, as John called Him in 1 John 2:1, “Jesus Christ, the righteous.”* The Holy Spirit has never had a part in any person’s life equal to the part He had in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. His participation was added confirmation that He was the Son of God.

What did Paul say next?

C. “Seen of angels.”

The angel Gabriel announced our Lord’s coming to Mary, and then to Joseph. Angels told the shepherds of His birth. Angels continually ministered to the Lord. But I think that the emphasis in this statement, “seen of angels,” was in the fact that it is obvious that angels saw the Lord first after His resurrection. And they gave testimony to the women who had come to the tomb that He was risen from the dead! So it was a fact. All of the fanciful ideas that unbelievers have had about the resurrection of Christ, for example, that He merely lived on in the memories of His disciples, are lies of the first order. Angels saw Him in His resurrection body, and gave testimony to the fact that though He had suffered and died on the Cross, and was alive, and would never die again.

And then Paul went on to say:

D. “Preached unto the Gentiles.”

So it was not that He came just to save the Jews, but His message went out to the Gentile world. So that salvation, and the godly life that always accompanies salvation, was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

But not only was our Lord preached to the Gentiles, but He was:

E. “Believed on in the world.”

Paul himself had seen this over and over again as he preached the Gospel throughout the Roman world. And since those days the ministry has continued until today those who believe in Christ, those who have trusted Him for their salvation, are found in all of the nations of the world. They are people who, to varying degrees, are living, or are learning to live, by faith. They have been saved by faith, and they live by faith.

Finally, Paul said,

F. “Received up into glory.”

He came from heaven, and He returned to heaven. And in heaven we know that He is seated at the Father’s right hand, the place of complete acceptance and total approval.

And what is He doing in heaven? He has gone to prepare a place for us, and He promised that He is coming again to receive us to Himself that we may be forever afterward “with Him,” and “like Him.”

Then we will know perfect godliness. But in the meantime Hebrews 7:25 tells us that we are all going to make it because “He ever lives to make intercession for us.”

Concl: How amazing all of this is! In the words of our text we have to agree that it is “great.” God has saved us, not just to take us to heaven. We can thank Him that that is a great part of it. But the main point, and that which will make heaven heaven, is that we will be a godly people, unable then to sin, but now seeking by prayer, by the power of the Word, by the ministry of the Spirit, to live each day to please our Lord

and to grow day by day more into His likeness. We can be a godly people (not perfect, but godly) because our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to take our penalty because we are sinners, but by His death He also provided for us the grace and power to be victors over sin and to live godly lives.

In the light, or darkness, of all that is going on in the name of the Lord today, I have given a lot of thought and prayer asking the Lord to show me from His Word what the main features of His work for us today. I have had no special revelation given to me, but I really don't need it because I think the Word of God is very clear that there are three things we need to be concerned about as we seek to serve God in our generation:

- 1) The obedience, the godliness of our own lives. God blesses those who seek to please Him by lives in which we are growing in holiness.
- 2) Prayer. Most of us pray too little. We allow our lives to be cluttered up with other things, often good things, but now the best: time spent in prayer, worshiping the Lord, casting our cares upon Him, and interceding for others.
- 3) Ministering the Word to others. May God forbid that we would spend our time here with anything but the Word. God works through His Word when it is served up by prayer from the hearts of His people who love Him and Who want to please Him.

May God enable us to be faithful in the way we live, and in the way we pray, and in the way we minister His Word to others. God's work done in God's way will always have God's blessing. Let us be thankful today that our Lord has manifested Himself to us.