

The Summary of True Religion

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: 1 Timothy 3:16

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Now, my message for you this morning will be taken from one verse of Scripture. I want you to open your Bibles with me to 1 Timothy chapter three, 1 Timothy chapter three. Let me read verse 16, 1 Timothy three verse 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 and received up unto glory.”

Someone has called this the summary of true religion. This is true religion. This verse does not deal with trivial matters. It involves the loftiest, most glorious themes of thought. God was manifest in the flesh. And Paul says that’s without controversy. No argument here. No debate. Great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifested in the flesh.

Now I know even people who do not believe the Scripture have to admit even if they don’t believe this, even if they have never paid any attention to it, they have to admit that this is the greatest news, the most glorious news ever proclaimed. Or this is the most amazing revelation or this is the most astonishing deceptive bit of news that man has ever heard. This is either the greatest thing that has ever been declared and if it is not true it is the worst deception that has ever been recorded or put forth to the public.

No one can be undecided about this. God was manifest in the flesh. No one can be undecided.

Paul is saying here that the almighty God, holy Lord of heaven and earth came down to this earth in the flesh, in the person of his only begotten son to die on a cross and to reveal to us God’s salvation for sinners. Do you know any thing more profound than this?

If you do, tell me what it is. This is the most profound statement that has ever been put forward. God was manifested in human flesh.

My subject is the greatest one because it involves our eternal salvation, my salvation and yours. We have but one soul. I have a body, but it is dying. I have a body, but it is on they way to the grave. I have a body, but it will return to the earth from which it came. But my soul either will live eternally in the presence of God or be eternally separated from almighty God. That is awesome, absolutely awesome.

And I want you to listen to me here. I have got something I want to say. In preaching the gospel I am not rattling the chains of denominationalism. The mystery of godliness is not a ceremony. The mystery of Godliness is not baptism. The mystery of godliness is not drops of water. The mystery of godliness is not rules of conduct. There are some rules. But that's not what the mysteries. It is almighty God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. That is what I am preaching.

And I am not setting dates. I am not setting dates and times of prophecy. I don't know a whole lot about what is going to happen. I am not trying to predict what is going to happen. But I sure am preaching what did happen. God...what did happen? God almighty came to this earth in the flesh and died for his people. God almighty came to this earth to die on a cross to redeem sinners. And this is not...listen. This is not exhibition, an exhibition of mere facts. I am not up here to preach facts. I am here to preach Christ. This is not an exhibition of theology. This message is alive. This message is a living hope. This message is a living proof.

Great, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh.

This is not cold logic and bare theology. This is living truth.

When our Lord came to this earth in the flesh God declared...this is what he declared. "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." And again he spoke from heaven and he said, "This is my beloved Son. Hear him. Pay attention. Listen to him because..." Listen. "I, the Lord, appointed him to be the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. I, the Lord, prepared him a body and sent him into the world. I, the Lord, made him to be sin for his people. I, the Lord, sent him to the cross. I, the Lord, smote him. I, the Lord, bruised him and I, the Lord, left him alone to die on that cross for his people. And I, the Lord, took him down from that cross and laid him a tomb and I, the Lord, raised him from the dead. I raised him from the dead and I exalted him at my right hand. And I gave him a name above every name that at the name of Jesus Christ, every knee," that means mine and yours and everybody in this cotton picking world, everybody, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess he is Lord to the glory of God almighty.

Now right down these four words in your mind anyway. If Jesus Christ died for us then we must have been hopelessly, helplessly lost, without hope, without help, without God in this world, if he died for us. If Jesus Christ died for us there sure is no other way to be saved. If Jesus Christ died for us he must have loved us with an incredible, indescribable unspeakable affection. He loved us and gave himself for us. That's why.

If he died for us...I am asking all of us, would not such love and grace motivate us to love him? Would not such love and grace motivate us to live for his glory and to serve him and his people and Church as long as we live? Oh, the love of Christ our Lord ought to motivate, constrain us that if he died for us we need to serve him.

Now let's look at this scripture in 1 Timothy chapter three verse 16, word for word almost, phrase by phrase. Without controversy, debate, argument, great is the mystery of

godliness. God was manifest in the flesh. The manger in Bethlehem is the bed of the Lord God.

Well might a multitude of angels surround that bed and cry, "Praise God. Glory to God in the highest. Peace, goodwill towards men."

The carpenter's shop in Nazareth is where he worked as a man. That's right. People walk by there, watched him work. He who made the worlds and put them in place, made a chair and a table and a cabinet for the people of the town.

This is Jesus, the carpenter. Yeah, that is who he is, but he is the Son of God.

The cross at Calvary, the cross at Calvary bears the human body of the incarnate God. Well might the sun refuse to shine when God died on the cross. He is the Son of God. And yet he is a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. That is my Savior.

He walked the billows of an obedient sea and yet he didn't own a foot of land. That is my Savior. He fed thousands, thousands, yet he sat on a well and asked a woman to give him a drink of water. That's my Savior.

He cast out demons and yet he himself was tempted of Satan. He was made of a woman and yet he made her.

In him was life yet he died. I can't explain that. I just know it is so. In him was life and yet he died.

And the Roman centurion as he watched the Lord Jesus die on the cross and he saw the earthquake in the darkness he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

And he is. And he is.

What is the second line here? Great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh. He was justified in the Spirit. What does that word "justified" mean? Vindicated. He was vindicated. All the claims of Christ and all the works of Christ have been vindicated of the Holy Spirit and proven to be true, all of them. The Scripture says...do you know what the Scripture says about a witness? The Scripture says that every word be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses.

Don't take the Word of one single voice. Every word must be proved and vindicated by two or three witnesses. That's the reason our Lord said, "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true either if I have no other witness."

But he has. Oh, he has two or three of the most outstanding.

Turn to 1 John, 1 John chapter five verse six, 1 John chapter five verse six. This... you got it? 1 John five verse six. This is he that came by water and blood even Jesus Christ. Not

by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the spirit that beareth witness because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost and these three are one.

There are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, the water, the blood and these three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. For this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself. He that believeth not God hath made him a liar because he believes not the record God gave his Son. And this is the record that God hath given us eternal life and this life is in his Son.

God was manifest in the flesh and justified, vindicated, proven by the Spirit, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What is the third? Here in our text. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of the angels at his birth. You know, a lot of things going on in religion today, buildings, telethons, all this sort of thing. But there is no witness from heaven that God is interested in any of it. There is no witness. There is no evidence. And yet when our Lord came, at his birth the angels of God, the angels saw the heaven born child in human flesh arrayed, the Son of God, the Son of Man was in a manger laid. And angels cried, "Peace on earth, praise to God." Yet they stood amazed at such a birth. The angels gave witness who he is.

And then in the wilderness, in the wilderness of temptation when he was tempted of the devil, God sent the angels to minister to him. At the tomb when the women came to the tomb, the angels of God appeared and they said this, "He is not here. He is risen."

And then at his ascension the angels of God proclaimed, "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as you see him go."

Our Lord, manifested in the flesh, justified by all the witnesses of God and seen and ministered to by heavenly angels.

Do you know what God wrote? He said this. "I have heard the voice of many angels round about the throne. The number of them was 10,000 times 10,000 and all of them cried with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb, Worthy is the Lamb to receive the seven fold blessing, power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessings, worthy is the Lamb.'"

That's the message from heaven. That is the word of the angels. Worthy is the Lamb. Worthy is the Lamb.

All right. Watch the next one. God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached to the Gentiles.

Is this a mystery? Is this a mystery that the gospel of Christ should be preached to the heathen? To the Gentiles? It certainly is. It certainly is. Yes, sir. God said so.

For 4000 years the nearest things to Christ was an angel. And the furthest thing from Christ as a Gentile. That is exactly. That is the reason Paul said this. What a miracle, what a mystery that Christ Jesus should be preached to the Gentiles.

Peter didn't even want to go see him. He didn't want to preach to them. And the Father said to him, "What I have called clean, don't you call anything else but clean. What I have called clean, you don't call it unclean."

Yes, sir.

Turn with me... Turn with me. You know, one person said this one time? In the Old Testament the people of Israel were eating the Passover. At the same time the Gentiles were eating each other, devouring each other. That's our record.

But turn to Ephesians two. Let me show you a couple of Scriptures here, the mystery, the miracle that Jesus Christ should be preached to the Gentiles, to you and me.

Look at here at Ephesians chapter two verse 11. Listen to this. Wherefore remember, remember, that ye being in times past Gentiles in your flesh called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands. At that time you were without Christ. You didn't have any covenant. You didn't have any hope. You didn't have any gospel. You didn't have any law. You didn't any sacrifices, didn't have a tabernacle, didn't have a prophet. Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers of the covenant, without God in this world. But now, oh listen. Now in Christ Jesus you that were sometimes far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Mystery. God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of the angels, preached to you and me.

Let me show you another one. Turn to Colossians, Colossians chapter one, verse 25. Colossians one verse 25. Listen to this. Paul says this, Colossians 1:25, "Whereof I am made a minister according to the stewardship or dispensation of God which he has given to me for you, you Gentiles, to fulfill the Word of God, even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest."

What mystery? Read that next verse.

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery to you Gentiles which is Christ in you the hope of glory.

Oh, I tell you. Thank God he included us. Thank God he included us.

Well, let's go back to that text again in 1 Timothy chapter three.

God was manifest in the flesh, justified and vindicated in the Spirit, seen of the angels, preached to the Gentiles. Watch this. And believed on, and believed on in this world.

Is this a mystery that Christ should be believed? The fact that Jesus Christ should be believed on in this world. Is that a mystery? Is that a miracle? Yes, sir. That's a miracle. My Father is omnipotent and that you can't deny. He is a God of might and miracle. It is written in the sky. It took a miracle to put the stars in place. It took a miracle to put the moon in place and the sun. But when he saved my soul, cleansed and made me whole, that took a miracle of his love and grace.

When the Son of God became the Son of Man, miracle. But I am telling you this. When one of you sons of man becomes a son of God that does take a miracle, a miracle.

But, oh, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called sons of God. Don't take that lightly. It's a miracle. It is the mystery of God. Behold what manner of love God hath bestowed upon us that we should be called sons of God.

Here is my testimony. Here is my testimony to you. And may I speak for you? Being your spokesman right now, let me speak for you. I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ came into the world and he died for us on the cross of Calvary to redeem us from sin. I believe this more than I believe anything else in this world. I believe this. Don't you?

Secondly, I believe that no fact in human history is more certain than the fact that Christ was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. I believe that. And I believe the Word of God more than I believe any other person.

I hear people were so and so said this. It doesn't matter. I believe God because by nature all men are liars. But God is true. God is true. I believe the Word of God more than I believe any person on this earth. And I am as sure, I am as sure of the promises of this precious book as I am that I am talking to you right now. You believe that, don't you? I do. I do.

And I have no way to explain this that I have this faith and you have this faith except to say it is the gift of God. It is the gift of God.

Write it down, now. This is the gift of God. This is the record. God hath given us eternal life. This life is in his Son. It is the gift of God.

Then the Lord will save whom he will.

People are religious by nature. They are saved by grace.

I have never seen God. Continue in my testimony and I am speaking for you. I have never seen God, have you? I hear preachers say, "God appeared to me."

I don't believe that.

“God said this to me.”

I don't believe that.

God says through the Word. I have never seen God except in creation. I see him out here in the things he has made. Yeah, I have seen him in beautiful nature out there, the things that God has made.

I see him in the love and kindness of his people. I see him in you. I see other folks. I don't see him in them. But I see him in you, his people. I do. I do. I see him in the love of a mother of a child a son or a daughter, a woman for a son.

I see him in my friends. I see him in my brothers and sisters. I see God in them. I hear God in them. They speak to me the words of God. I have never heard God speak. Have you? Except in his Word. I do hear him in his Word. I have the words of the Bible which, indeed, speak to me. They speak to my heart. They speak to my Spirit. They speak to my soul. I hear God speaking through his Word. This is not just words. It is his words.

And I have no signs. Sometimes I wish God would give me some. But that's his business.

I said I have no signs except the miracle of grace that actually transforms, actually transforms a child of the devil into a child of God, that actually transforms a wicked man to a believer, a blasphemer to a man who praises God. I see it in you, Chris. I see it in others out here. I see it in Jim Dodson, Lionel. I see God transforming you into his child. It is a miracle of God, a child of the king. That is who you are. Daughters of the king, that's who you are. And I see God in you. I hear God speak in you.

I had a friend, brother...now, you know, I am remember things a long time ago. I forget my friend's name or something. But I have a friend that gave an illustration one time and about an old coal miner up in West Virginia. He was a big guy, six foot four, five and mean as a snake. Like Ernie Ford said one fist of iron and another of steel. If the left one don't get you, the right one will, you know. That's old big Mike. Everybody called him old big Mike, hard as nails. Mean as a snake. Worked in the coal mines. Pushed those old buggies, you know, to take the coal to the [?].

The Lord saved that guy. God in mercy...and it took God in mercy to change the life of that rebel. Old big Mike became Mike the person that loved Christ, just changed him over, just changed him completely.

And people started, started ridiculing him. They would poke at him, trying to get him to curse or swear or hit somebody in the mouth or do something, do something, just do something.

They wanted to see...see him lose his religion. Well old big Mike didn't. But they kept on agitating him. And one day a bunch of those men there in the coal mine put the rocks in the way of his buggy pushing the coal, kept falling off the rails, falling off the rails. And he would stop and walk around and pick the rocks up and put them back. Those fellows, snickering at him, snickering at him. Keep on.

They did it one time too many. His face...pulled himself up to his full height. His face was red as a beet. His fists were doubled up and he lifted those fists to the sky and he began to sing. "I need thee ever hour, most gracious Lord. Temptations lose their power though art near. I need thee..."

Believe it or not, those fellows hushed. They started singing with him. "I need thee, oh, I need thee. Bless me now my Savior. I come to thee."

That happens. God changes a man. If he does, he changes.

And then here is my last point. He said, "God was manifest in the flesh, seen of the angels, justified in the Spirit, preached to the Gentiles, believed on in the world and received up into glory."

Turn to John 14 where brother Todd was preaching last night, John 14 verse one. And he said these words, "Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions, many dwelling places. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself that while I am there you may be also. And whither I go you know and the way you know. And Thomas said, 'Lord, we know not whither thou goest. How can we know the way?' And Jesus said, 'Thomas, I am the way. I am the truth. I am the light. No man cometh to the Father, but by me.'"

What a miracle, what a mystery, what a Savior, what a gospel. What a wonderful congregation. Thank God for you and for your pastor.