

“The Mystery Of Godliness”

Introduction. We are quite used to reading captivating and thought-provoking biographies of great men and women which span several hundred pages and require years of preparation. While investigating the lives of great women and men of history may seem very interesting, there is one life in history which demands our utmost attention: the life of Jesus Christ. Volumes upon volumes have been written about the man Jesus, but none more captivating and truthful than those found in the Bible. In just a few short words, the life of our Savior is resurrected in our minds. The Bible is a vast, inexhaustible storehouse of spiritual truth.

We need regularly to be reminded of the foundational truths of our faith. It has been said that the theme of 1 Timothy is found in 3:15. This is the heart of the church’s work and vs. 16 is said to be the heart of its message.

In 1 Timothy 3:16, the “mystery of godliness” is revealed to us. “Mystery” means something sacred that is hidden or secret and naturally unknown to human reason that is only known by the revelation of God. The “mystery of godliness” is Jesus Christ. He is the epitome of perfection and godliness, and the doctrines which make us godly depend upon God’s revelation of Him. Paul uses the word “mystery” 17 times in his epistles. Mark uses it once in his gospel and John uses it four times in Revelation for a total of 22 times in the New Testament.

This verse displays uniformity in the way it uses six verbs in the same voice and tense in succession. Many have reasoned that it was used as sort of a hymn. It also contains rhythm and parallelism. However it was used, this verse presents a wonderful outline of the life of Christ.

I. ***He Was Manifested In The Flesh***

- A. This means that Jesus became visible in the flesh (John 1:1-3, 14-18; 1 John 1:1-4; 4:2-3). He made the invisible God visible to human eyes. This affirms Christ’s preexistence (John 8:58; 17:5; Philippians 2:6-7).
- B. This revealing in the flesh was necessary so that Christ might take away the sins of the world (Romans 16:25-26; Colossians 1:25-27; Hebrews 2:14-15). The hope or foundation of glory rests in knowing Jesus Christ. He is the one to whom we must turn (Acts 4:8-12).

II. ***He Was Justified By The Spirit***

- A. The word “justified” does not carry with it the normal New Testament meaning. Instead, it means “to be vindicated.” He was “vindicated” or shown to be the Son of God by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Consider the following examples:

1. The Holy Spirit descended at the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:16).
 2. The Holy Spirit was sent to convict the world of sin because it did not believe on Jesus (John 16:8-9).
 3. Jesus cast out devils by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:28).
 4. The Holy Spirit was given to Him without measure (John 3:34).
- B. Jesus suffered many cruelties here on this earth (Isaiah 53:1-12). Christ was reproached as a sinner and put to death as a common criminal, even though He was the "Just One" (Acts 7:52; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
- C. God did not leave Jesus to be seen as a criminal among men. His vindication or justification came by His miracles, His life and His resurrection (Romans 1:3-4). This event proved that God put His stamp of approval upon the life of Christ and all of this can be correctly regarded as an attestation of the Holy Spirit as to the divine mission of Jesus.

III. ***He Was Seen Of Angels***

- A. The word "seen" means "to see," "to visit," "to observe," or "to be attendant to." Throughout our Lord's ministry, the angels observed and attended to Him:
1. The angels were present at the birth of Christ (Luke 2:8-13).
 2. The angels ministered to Him at His temptation (Matthew 4:11).
 3. The angels strengthened Him at Gethsemane (Luke 22:43).
 4. An angel rolled away the stone at the door of His tomb (Matthew 28:2).
 5. Angels appeared to the women, affirming that Jesus had risen (Luke 24:4-7).
 6. Two angels attended Christ's ascension (Acts 1:10-11).
- B. The design of Paul is to give an impressive view of the grandeur and glory of that work which attracted the attention and interest of the heavenly host. The work of Christ, though despised by men, excited the deepest interest in heaven. This too, signifies the divine approval of the Messiah.

IV. ***He Was Taught Among The Nations***

- A. Jesus fulfilled the scriptures by preaching to the Gentiles (Matthew 4:12-17). Before His ascension, Jesus proclaimed that the disciples were His witnesses who would teach all nations (Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8).
- B. Paul was set to be a light to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47; 24:16-18). The Gentiles were long isolated from the heritage of the Jews, but now that dividing wall is broken down (Ephesians 2:14-16). It is a great privilege to be permitted to proclaim that all men are equally the objects of divine compassion (John 4:34-38; Acts 8:4-5; 1 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

V. ***He Was Embraced By Faith***

- A. Jesus Christ is for the entire world (John 3:16-18). He is the light of the world (John 8:12). The plan of God was fulfilled as the proclamation of the apostles resulted in faith and obedience in many lives. It began at Pentecost and included thousands who believed and obeyed Him (Acts 2:37, 41). Christ has not been preached in vain. Throughout history there have been millions of people who have believed and obeyed Jesus Christ.
- B. Who would have thought that the world, so evil and wicked, would have believed on Jesus? Who would have thought that anyone would be willing to take up their cross? Every person is an unbeliever first and a Christian second (Acts 17:23, 34). The gospel overcame a strong and universal reluctance (Acts 13:45; 14:2, 19; 17:5, 13; 18:12; 20:3; 21:27; 23:27; 25:7, 15; 26:21; Revelation 3:8-10).

VI. ***He Was Received Up Into Glory***

- A. Jesus is now sitting on the right hand of God (Acts 1:9-11; Hebrews 1:3; Philippians 2:8-11). He blazed a trail for us into heaven (Hebrews 6:19-20). His ascension showed that the Father was pleased and accepted His work.
- B. He now ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). Jesus' suffering on this earth and then going up to glory parallels our own lives (Romans 8:18). No event of greater importance has ever occurred in the universe, of which we have any knowledge, than the ascension of Christ to glory, after accomplishing the redemption of mankind.

Conclusion. In six short stanzas, this hymn summarizes the gospel. John MacArthur relates the following story: There was once an old church in England. A sign on the front of the building read, "We preach Christ crucified." After some time, ivy grew up and obscured the last word. The motto now read, "We preach Christ." The ivy grew some more, and the motto read, "We preach." Finally, ivy covered the entire sign, and the church died. Such is the fate of any church that fails to carry out its mission in the world.

What is left in this mystery? You need to receive him. Why do you wait? You need Him (Acts 2:38-40; 22:16). Seek the Lord while He may be found (Isaiah 55:1-7; 59:1-2, 9-14, 20-21; 60:1-5). God desires that you be in a right situation with Him. This verse explains to you what you give your life to serve.

Let us remember that God was manifest in the flesh to take away our sins, to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These doctrines must be demonstrated by the fruit of the Spirit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23).