

THE GREAT MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

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A SERMON
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*“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.”
 1 Timothy 3:16*

THE apostle had just reminded Timothy that the church of the living God is the pillar and ground of the truth, and he had pressed it upon him to behave himself aright in the midst of those faithful men to whom the Lord had committed the Gospel. And lest by any means the youthful minister should think that the treasure committed to the church was of little value, he declares that beyond all controversy it was great and precious.

Every heathenish religion had its mystery, its secret doctrine revealed only to the initiated, which was held to be the essence of the faith. The mystery of some religions was mere froth, foolish if untrue, and if true of no consequence to anyone. But even those who do not believe the facts of our religion can hold no controversy with us about the unspeakable greatness of them, if they be indeed true.

Be a man what he may, if he be reasonable he will admit that Christianity does not deal in trifles. Like the eagle, it does not hawk for flies, it aspires to conquer the loftiest themes of thought. Right or wrong, the subjects with which we deal are not secondary, but wear about them an awesome interest which none but the frivolous despise.

Jesus sits in no second place among teachers. Paul mentions what the mystery of godliness is, and declares that it concerns the manifestation of God in human flesh, that He might save men from their sin. Now, says he, without controversy this is a great matter, if it be received by us as true, it becomes us to act as those who are put in trust with a priceless deposit with which we dare not be otherwise than faithful.

There is no room for indifference where the Gospel is concerned—it is either the most astounding of impostures or the most amazing of revelations. No man can safely remain undecided about it, it is too weighty, too solemn to be snuffed at as a matter of no concern. Foes and friends alike confess that the mystery of godliness is great. It is no rippling rill of dogma, but a broad ocean of thought, no molehill of discovery, but an Alp of revelation, no single beam of light but a sun shining at its strength.

I shall, this morning, first take up *the apostle's summary* of our religion. Secondly, I shall give *a few notes upon it*. And thirdly, draw one or two *inferences from it*.

I. First let us carefully look at THE SUMMARY OF TRUE RELIGION handed by the apostle to his son in the faith.

1. The first article in this most authentic apostle's creed declares that, “*God was manifest in the flesh.*” This is claimed as an especially valuable part of the great mystery of godliness. My brethren, if you will carefully consider it, this is one of the most extraordinary doctrines that was ever declared in human hearing.

For were it not well-attested, it would be absolutely incredible that the infinite God who fills all things, who was, and is, and is to come, the Almighty, the Omniscient, and the Omnipresent, actually condescended to veil Himself in the garments of our inferior clay. He made all things, and yet He deigned to take the flesh of a creature into union with Himself. The Infinite was linked with the infant and the Eternal was blended with mortality.

That manger at Bethlehem, tenanted by the express image of the Father's glory, was a great sight indeed to those who understood it. Well might the angels troop forth in crowds from within the gates of pearl, that they might behold Him whom heaven could not contain, finding accommodation in a stable with a lowly wedded pair. Wonder of wonders! God over all, blessed forever, became one with a newborn babe which slept in a manger where the horned oxen fed.

"God was manifest in the flesh." In this Paul testifies not merely to our Lord's birth, but to the whole of the divine manifestation in His life of two or three and thirty years. He was abundantly manifest among the multitudes and before His disciples during the latter part of His life. He was God in miracles most plenteous, but He was man in sufferings most pitiable.

He was the Son of the Highest, and nevertheless, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He trod the billows of the obedient sea, and yet He owned not a foot of land in all Judea. He fed thousands by His power, and yet all faint and weary He sat upon a well, and cried, "Give me to drink." He cast out devils, but was Himself tempted of the devil. He healed all manner of diseases, and was Himself exceeding sorrowful even unto death.

Winds and waves obeyed Him, every element acknowledged the august presence of deity, and yet He was tempted in all points like as we are. Our Lord's manhood was no phantasm, no myth, no mere appearance in human shape—beyond all doubt "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." "Handle me and see," said He, "a spirit has not flesh and bones as ye see I have." "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing."

Yet with equal certainty, *God* was manifest in Him. As the light streams through the lantern, so the glory of Godhead flamed through the flesh of Jesus, and those who were His nearest companions bear witness, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

That revelation of God in the flesh became yet more extraordinary when, at last, our Lord condescended to be put to death by His own creatures. Arraigned before human tribunals, condemned as guilty of the gravest crimes, He is taken from prison and from judgment, with none to declare His generation. He is fastened to the accursed wood, and put to a death of deepest shame and bitterest torture.

O you whose loving eyes have looked upon the ensanguined rills which gush from the wounds of your bleeding Lord, and have delighted to behold the lily of the valleys reddened into the rose of Sharon with the crimson of His own blood, you can see God in Christ as you behold rocks rending, the sun darkened, and the dead arising from their tombs at the moment of His departure from the earth—behold in the writhing form of the Crucified Man the vengeance and the love of God, nor less behold divine power sustaining the load of human guilt, and divine compassion enduring such agonies for rebels so ill-deserving. Truly this Son of man was also the Son of God.

Beloved, this is a mystery surpassing all comprehension. If any man should attempt to explain, or even to define the union of the divine and human in the Lord Jesus, he would soon prove his folly. The schoolmen of the dark ages were very fond of asking puzzling questions about what they called the hypostatical union of the deity and humanity of Christ. They could not cast so much as a ray of light upon the subject. They amused themselves with enigmas and lost themselves in labyrinths. It is enough for us to know that the incarnation is a glorious fact and it suffices us to hold it in its simplicity. God was manifest in the flesh of Jesus Christ the incarnate Word.

Beloved, this is a *great* mystery—*great because it treats of God*. Any doctrine which relates to the Infinite and the Eternal is of the utmost weight. We should be all ear and all heart when we have to learn concerning God. Reason teaches us that He who made us, who is our preserver, and at whose word we are soon to return to the dust, should be the first object of our thoughts.

Turn you hither, you wayward children of Adam, and behold this great mystery, for your God is here. A bush burning and unconsumed would attract your curious gaze—what think you of a man who was in union with the God who is a consuming fire?

The truth of God manifest in flesh is great if you consider the *great honor which is thereby conferred upon manhood*. How is man honored in God's taking the nature of man into union with Himself, for verily He took not upon Him the nature of angels, but He took upon Him the seed of Abraham!

Whichever of all the creatures shall come nearest to the Creator will evidently have the preeminence in the ranks of creatureship, which then shall bear the palm. Shall not the seraphs be chosen? Shall not the swift-winged sons of fire be chief among heaven's courtiers? Behold, and be astonished, a worm is preferred, a rebellious child of the earth is chosen! Human nature is espoused into oneness with the divine!

There is no gulf between God and redeemed man at this hour. God is first, over all, blessed forever, but next comes man in the person of the man Christ Jesus. Well may we say with David, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet."

Man is royal now that Christ is human. Man is exalted since Christ is humiliated. Man may go up to God now that God has come down to man. This is great, is it not? A mystery, certainly, but great in every way. See that you despise it not, lest you miss the abounding benefit which flows to man through this golden channel.

My brethren, the mystery appears greatest of all because *it is so nearly connected with our eternal redemption*. There could have been no putting away of sin by vicarious suffering if God had not become incarnate. Sin is not removed except by an atonement, neither would any person have sufficed to atone but one of like nature to those who had offended.

By man came death, by man also must come resurrection. Jesus appears as man to save His people from their sins, by taking the sins of His people upon Himself and offering a propitiation for them. What a wondrous sight was the dying Redeemer! The cross is the focus of all human history—I was almost going to say it is the center of the life of God, if such a thing can be.

All the ages meet in Calvary. Jesus is the central Sun of all events. O, gaze again, and marvel more and more that God should put Himself into the place of His offending creature, and in the person of His dear Son, should offer to eternal justice a compensation for the insults which sin had cast upon law and rule! There is no greatness in heaven or earth if it be not here in the bleeding flesh of Jesus, the Son of God. All else is dwarfed into nothingness in His presence.

Beloved, the manifestation of God in Jesus crucified will appear to be great to you if you have ever drank deep into its meaning. If, standing at the foot of the cross, you have seen all your sins punished in the person of the incarnate God, and have heard the voice which says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," you cannot think lightly of the Word made flesh.

If you have learned that His blood has brought perfect pardon to all believers, and that through the rent veil of His flesh the saints have access to God and entrance into heaven, you will lay hold upon the great truth of an incarnate Deity with a grasp which neither the trials of life nor the terrors of death shall unclasp.

You will hate the very thought of denying the Godhead of the Lord that bought you—you will be jealous for His great name and burn with sacred zeal for His glory. Your heart will cry out indignantly, "Away from me, you rejecters of the divine Redeemer. If you rob Christ of His glory, I count you the worst of thieves. 'Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father,' and in denying Jesus you reject the one God Himself!"

2. The apostle mentions, in the next place, the important witness by which the mission of Jesus was confirmed. He was "*justified in the Spirit.*" By the word "Spirit," we understand the Holy Spirit, although it may be understood of the spiritual nature of Christ, in which He was always justified, though in the flesh He was condemned of men. It appears more natural to confine the expression to the Holy Spirit.

Every religion demands our attention in proportion to the certainty of its teachings and the value of its confirmatory testimony. How matchless is the seal which is set upon the mystery of godliness, since the Holy Spirit has been pleased Himself, personally and repeatedly to confirm it! If we demand trustworthy evidence, behold the Holy Spirit bearing witness to our most holy faith, both in heaven and in earth!—"It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth."

Observe what part the Holy Spirit took in connection with our Lord. The formation of the immaculate body of the holy child Jesus was by the energy of the Holy Ghost—as the angel said to Mary, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

Afterwards, the Holy Spirit owned this same most sacred person, in whom God was manifest, by descending upon Him at His baptism in the waters of Jordan. John, who was the forerunner and witness of Jesus, bore record, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him; and I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptise with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptiseth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."

The heavens were opened, and the Spirit, the voice of God, proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." On one or two other occasions we have it upon the testimony of witnesses who were present, that an audible voice was heard out of the excellent glory, saying, "This is my beloved Son: hear ye him."

The greatest attestation which the Holy Spirit gave to Christ was the raising of Him from the dead. In some respects Christ rose from the dead by His own power, but it is a Scriptural doctrine that He was "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead."

The power by which we are converted is evidently the Holy Spirit, and we read in the Ephesians, "The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead."

Moreover, let us not forget that forty days after our Master had been taken up from us, while the disciples were gathered together with one accord in one place, suddenly they heard a sound as of a rushing mighty wind, which filled all the place where they were sitting. The Holy Ghost, whom Jesus had promised, had come to make good the word of the Lord.

You have not forgotten the miraculous flames of fire which sat upon each of the disciples, and how they spake with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance! You know how that day three thousand were converted to the faith by the testimony of those first champions of Christ! Thus the Holy Spirit bore witness with signs and miracles, and wondrous gifts, that He who professed to be incarnate Deity was most truly God and the Savior of men.

Beloved, if you complain that this attestation has now ceased, and that the record of miracles is rather a strain upon your faith than an assistance to it, I would remind you that the Spirit of God has not ceased from the midst of the church. The Holy Ghost no longer operates upon material substances, the sick are not healed, and the dead are not raised—this we freely confess, but He still acts with equally wonderful results upon the minds of men.

In this very house there have been miracles performed, which, in lasting value, put the raising of the dead to the blush. Many of us who are now present bear witness that by the Spirit of God we have been newly created, raised from spiritual corruption, delivered from the dominion of Satan, and translated into the kingdom of God.

The swine of drunkenness have been made lovers of holiness, the beasts of sensuality have become partakers of the divine nature—what better sign is needed? When hearts of adamant melt like wax, and streams of penitence flow from souls as hard as flinty rocks, who will refuse to believe? Let the Gospel be judged by its fruits, and we are satisfied with the trial.

If it does not turn the moral desert into an Eden, transform the lion into a lamb, and raise up the beggar from the dunghill, then let it be rejected. But since it has done this, and is doing it, let its despisers beware lest they commit the sin against the Holy Ghost while they reject the solemn evidences which He daily thrusts before our eyes.

Brethren, in our own souls the blessed Spirit has borne most overwhelming witness when we have been bowed in penitence at Jesus' feet, and then have been lifted up into the loftiest joy as we found pardon in His blood. The Spirit of God is with us still, working with the Word of God.

See the savage casting away his weapons, the cannibal softened into the man. What philosophy could not do and did not care to attempt—what civilization never could have accomplished alone, the cross of Christ has effectually performed. The Spirit of God is with us, and both in the holiness of the saints, and in the conversions of unbelievers, He bears witness that God was in Christ.

3. Our apostle writes, as the next part of the great mystery of godliness, that Christ “*was seen of angels.*” Jesus was seen of angels at His birth. They appeared to the shepherds, and bade them hasten to Bethlehem, while they themselves looked on with holy wonder—

*“They saw the heaven-born Child, in human flesh array’d,
Benevolent and mild, while in a manger laid!
And praise to God, and peace on earth,
For such a birth, proclaim’d aloud.”*

Our Lord was watched by holy spirits in the wilderness where, after He had conquered that arch tempter, angels ministered unto Him. He was with the wild beasts at one moment, and then seraphic spirits waited in His train. An angel ministered unto Him in Gethsemane, when His sweat was as it were great drops of blood.

Upon Calvary they watched Him too, and doubtless, as the poet says—

*“Around the bloody tree they press’d with strong desire
That wondrous sight to see, the Lord of life expire;
And could their eyes have known a tear,
Had dropped it there in sad surprise.”*

Visions of angels were seen by the witnesses of His resurrection. Two clothed in white sat the one at the head and the other at the foot where the body of Jesus had lain. Angels met Him at His ascension, when the clouds received Him out of the sight of His gazing followers. And they attended Him up to glory, crying, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.”

The apostle mentions this to show the greatness of our religion, since the most noble intellects are interested in it. Did you ever hear of angels hovering around the assemblies of philosophical societies? Very interesting papers are sometimes produced speculating upon geological facts. Startling discoveries are every now and then made as to astronomy and the laws of motion. We are frequently surprised at the results of chemical analyses.

Yet I do not remember ever reading even in poetry that angelic beings have shown any excitement at the news. The fact is, that the story of the world's history in geologic times, and all the facts about this world, are as well-known to angels as the letters of the alphabet are to us. All our profound sciences and recondite theories must seem utterly contemptible.

Those august minds which have been long ago created of God, and preserved from defilement by His decree, are better able to judge than we are of the importance of things. And when we find them deeply interested in a matter, it cannot be of small account. Concerning an incarnate God, it is said, “Which things the angels desire to look into.”

Their views of God's manifesting Himself in the flesh are such, that over the mercy seat they stand with outspread wings gazing in reverent admiration, and before the throne they sing, "Worthy is the Lamb, for He was slain."

The doctrine of incarnate Deity, may be folly to the Greeks, and the vainglorious wiseacres of this world may call it commonplace, but to angels it is an ever flowing fount of adoring admiration. They turn from every other sight to view the incarnate Redeemer, regarding His condescending deed of grace as a bottomless ocean of mystery, a topless steep of wonder. Jesus was seen of angels, and they still delight to gaze upon Him—this to the apostle's mind was conclusive evidence that the doctrines of our faith are of the greatest importance.

4. Then, he passes on to the next truth, Jesus Christ was *preached unto the Gentiles*. Was this a great thing? Is preaching a wonder? Yes. The preaching of the Gospel proves conclusively the grandeur of our religion. The nearest to Christ were the angels—He was seen of them. The furthest from Christ were fallen Gentiles, who had given themselves up to the worship of the works of their own hands, to these also Jesus came.

That Jesus Christ was preached to the Gentiles at all, was a wonder which it behooves us not to forget. As Paul says, "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands: that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

"For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace."

The Gentiles were brutalized with groveling vices, and no form of spiritual faith had ever found footing among them—was then the most spiritual of all religions to be taught to them, and carried to them by no other means than that of preaching? This surprised our apostle. And what surprises me still more is this, that Christ was preached to the Gentiles *by Jews*—that those whose bigotry at that time was invincible, so that they could not imagine such a thing as a Gentile being in covenant with God, were the very men who with indefatigable ardor went among the Gentiles to preach Jesus Christ.

If you had told an intelligent Jew that some of his fellow countrymen would become apostles to the Gentiles, to declare that the wall which surrounded the favored nation was broken down, he would have smiled incredulously, and exclaimed, "Impossible! You may cut the Jew in pieces first. The belief that his race is peculiarly favored of God lies in the very heart and marrow of the Israelite. He will never consent to become one with the Gentile dogs."

Yet Jesus the King of the Jews, Israel's hope and consolation, was first published to the heathen by Jews, and chiefly by one who boasted that he was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee." Paul, the most ferocious of bigots, who counted that he did God's service when he hunted out the disciples of Christ, became the Gentile's friend and spiritual father. This is a startling fact.

It is a most noteworthy fact in the history of our faith, that Jesus is still preached among the nations, and the church labors to make Him everywhere known. What other religion spends so much energy in seeking converts?

If any of you were foolish enough to wish to become Jews, you would not be welcomed among the Jewish fraternity. No Israelite ever attempts to proselyte us to his opinions. It would be a novelty indeed to hear of Jewish missionaries sent out to convert the heathen from their superstitions or to recover Christians from their errors.

No, the Jew does not want us, he prefers to keep his heritage for himself and his heirs. How far different is it with the followers of Jesus, whose very watchword is "Preach the gospel to every creature!" In the case of all other religions, the preaching to the Gentiles is absent. I am not aware of any Mahometan society for the conversion of the world to the Prophet.

I never saw in the streets of London a Brahmin, come from far, to convert the crowds of London to the doctrines of the Shasters. Nor have I ever seen a Buddhist thrusting himself into the midst of peril to win the savage to his creed. Let any other faith than the Christian show me a man traversing alone the center of Africa, like Livingstone, or dwelling alone with Bushmen, as Moffat has done. The fact is that the spirit of false creeds is rather monopoly than extension. But as for the religion of Christ, it is expansive as the arch of heaven.

If I could, I would have all men saved. If it were possible, I would have every one of you partakers of Christ Jesus this very morning. and we would cheerfully lay down our lives if we could extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ to the utmost bounds of the earth. What is it that keeps up this incessant preaching of Christ? Nothing but the real force of our faith.

O you heathen, if your religions be true, why do you not promulgate them? Gods of the heathen, if you be gods, why do you not command your worshippers to convert the nations to your allegiance? But no, they confess the worthlessness of their system, in that these systems are not preached among the Gentiles, and have no vitality to secure their spread.

When these religions do attempt to spread themselves, which is rarely enough, how do they do it? Mahomet put a scimitar into the hand of each one of his followers, and said, "That is the strength of Islamism: use that sharp argument upon the nations."

But Christ refused all carnal weapons and chose the simple preaching of the Word. What other faith can dare to depend upon preaching—upon one man's testimony to other men about truth precious to himself? Surely this goes to show that the things which we believe are powerful, and worthy to be considered with attentive respect.

5. Another great part of the mystery is that Christ is *believed on in the world*. I will acknowledge that I have often wondered at this sentence, and have asked why Paul should write it down as a great mystery that Christ should be believed on in the world. And yet it is a marvel of marvels. If you think how sunken the world was in vice, how darkened the understanding of man was with ignorance, it is astounding that such men should receive so holy and so spiritual a religion as that which Jesus Christ preached by His servants.

We come to you who are fond of sin, and we tell you that you must give up your favorite pleasures, that cherished vices must be abandoned, that holiness which is distasteful to you must rule your life. And yet obnoxious as these things are to flesh and blood, when the Holy Spirit comes with the Word, you believe them and accept them joyfully.

The apostle, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, uses the following language, "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

Was not this extraordinary that such horrible characters should become lovers of the pure and holy Jesus? Must not a religion which can change such as these be something more than a cunningly devised fable?

In another place, we are told of all mankind, "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Is it not a wonder that such depraved minds should perceive beauties in the Lord Jesus, and yield their full confidence to Him?

Indeed, to every saved man, it is the greatest miracle of all that he is himself a believer. When I come to look at the truths upon which I rest, they are very simple indeed, and yet around them so many doubts are cast by the evil of my own heart, that I stand amazed my faith retains her hold. I believe that Christ died for my sins with much more assurance than I believe anything else.

No fact in history is one-half as certain to me, and yet, at times, it is so hard to believe it, that it is clear to me that true faith is not of man, but is a fruit of the Spirit. Great must be the truth which forces itself upon the conviction of minds so dark and so benighted as ours.

The apostle winds up his summary of the mystery by reminding us that Christ was “*received up into glory.*” This is no small truth surely, that the Apostle and High Priest of our profession has not gone from us into obscurity, but is at this day sitting upon the throne of God! At this hour Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, upholding all things by the word of His power.

He shall shortly come to be our Judge. He shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the trump of the archangel and the voice of God, and all men shall be gathered before Him to receive their final sentence. This is no small truth, but a great one to be proclaimed with zeal. Thus, throughout, the burden of our religion is far from trivial. “Great is the mystery of godliness.”

II. I must now detain you with a few NOTES UPON THIS SUMMARY. Paul has here given us an outline of the Christian faith and we note upon it as follows—

First, *it is all concerning Christ.* Out of these six articles of Paul’s creed, they all speak of Christ, from which I gather that if we are to preach the Gospel faithfully, we must preach much concerning Jesus Christ. My dear brethren, this must be the first, the midst, and end of our ministry. That man of whom it cannot be said that he preaches Christ, does not behave himself aright in the house of God. He evidently is not a messenger sent from heaven.

It is our business here to cry with John the Baptist, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Brethren, as it is ours to preach Christ, so it is yours to receive Him. If you have received a gospel of which Christ is not the top and bottom, throw it away. If you are resting on anything beside Christ Jesus, you are resting upon a rotten foundation. Get off of it, lest you be deceived at the last. But if Christ is all in all to you, and His work and person are the sum and substance of your hope, then be of good cheer. Where Jesus is honored, souls are safely sheltered.

I notice, in the second place, that there is *not here a single word upon Sacramentarianism.* Now, in these days, we are perpetually told by men who are manifestly in earnest, that the great thing is the sacrament. According to their teaching, God has committed to bishops and priests the fullness of His grace, which we meekly and reverently may receive at their venerable hands.

We are told that, in connection with a few drops of water, sprinkled by the successors of the apostles, children become regenerate. Through the laying on of these same blessed hands, we afterwards become confirmed in the faith, and assured of our salvation. Through priestly power we are made partakers of the very body and blood of Christ, which, according to them, becomes literally present through their operation.

When we come to die, they can anoint us with oil, consecrated by their power, and by this unction all our sins are forgiven us. The top and the bottom of the system is the priest, the priest, the priest. A man like ourselves, and not a whit better, but ten thousand times worse for his infamous impudence in pretending to be what he is not. This man, dressed out in as many colors as the peacock, is the divinely appointed medium of grace.

If this be the truth, Paul did not know it, for if he had known it, he would say, “Great is the mystery of godliness. God dwells in the priests, hasten and kiss their feet, for by their ceremonials you get salvation.” Paul says nothing of the kind. He has nothing to reveal about candles, and copes, and pompous processions.

All he has to say is this, “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,” and that is all. How different this simple Gospel from the complex machinery of Catholicism and Anglicanism!

I want you to notice still further, that in this summary there is *no exhibition of mere doctrine.* I believe, most firmly, in the doctrines commonly called Calvinistic, and I hold them to be very fraught with comfort to God’s people. But if any man shall say that the preaching of these is the whole of the preaching of the Gospel, I am at issue with him.

Brethren, you may preach those doctrines as long as you like, and yet fail to preach the Gospel. And I will go further, and affirm that some who have even denied those truths, to our great grief, have nevertheless been Gospel preachers for all that, and God has saved souls by their ministry.

The fact is, that while the doctrines of election, final perseverance, and so on, go to make up a complete ministry, and are invaluable in their place, yet the soul and marrow of the Gospel is not there, but is to be found in the great fact that “God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit,” and so on.

Preach Christ, young man, if you want to win souls. Preach all the doctrines, too, for the building up of believers, but still the main business is to preach Jesus who came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost.

The apostle tells us in Corinthians that first of all he delivered unto us as soul-saving truth, “How that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again on the third day, according to the scriptures.” Facts about Christ Jesus, and the promise of life through Him, these are the faith of the Gospel.

Let me also say that I do not perceive anything in this summary *tending remarkably to exalt prophecy*. I would not make this remark were it not that there is a certain troublesome sect abroad nowadays to whom the one thing necessary is a perpetual speculation upon prophecy. All the bells in their steeple ring out, “Prophecy! Prophecy! Prophecy!”

They plume themselves upon an expected secret rapture and I know not what vain imaginings besides. Where prophecy is preached in connection with their shibboleth, there the Gospel is preached, but all ministers beside their own, however honored by God, are railed at by them as part of Babylon, against whom men are to be warned.

They, indeed, are wise men, and can afford superciliously to look down upon their fellow Christians as the slaves of sect and system, being, I venture to say, far more sectarian than the worst of us, and more bigoted to their system than Romanists themselves.

My dear friends, if you have any time to spare, and cannot find any practical work for Jesus, study the dark places of prophecy, but do not read modern prophetic works, for that is a sheer waste of time and nothing better. Hold off as you would from a serpent from the idea that the study or preaching of prophecy is the Gospel, for the belief that it is so is mischievous beyond conception.

The Gospel which is to be vehemently declared is this—“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.” So long as London is reeking with sin, and millions are going down to hell, let us leave others to prophesy, let us go with anxious hearts to seek after souls, and see if we cannot by the Spirit’s power win sinners from going down into the pit.

You will, doubtless, have observed that this summary of the Gospel is *very simple*. Whenever you meet with teaching which is cloudy and complicated, you may generally conclude that it is not the Gospel of your salvation, for the truth of Christ is so plain that he who runs may read, and the wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein.

Perhaps some of you have been thinking that conversion and salvation are dark and mysterious things, and that you have to pass through many singular operations and feelings in order to be saved. Now, beloved, the whole of our faith lies in a nutshell. He that believes in Jesus Christ the incarnate God, is saved.

These few truths of God if grasped by the mind, received and trusted in by the heart, will save you. It is at the cross that salvation must be found. We have not written over our religion, “Mystery, mystery, mother of harlots,” this is the sign of Babylon, but we have this to tell you, “He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned,” and the things which you have to believe are just these simplicities—Jesus the Son of God has come into this world as man to save men. He has bled and died. He is proclaimed and preached. He is to be received and believed in. He has gone up to glory to prepare a place for them that trust Him, and that is all.

III. THE INFERENCES I draw from this are just these. If this be a great Gospel, then *how important it is for us to receive it*. If the Gospel were a laborious system of ethics, there are many in this house who never could be saved, for they could not understand it. But since it is so simple, why do men refuse it?

“Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” O will you not lay hold upon that truth? I do pray the Spirit of God to take off your minds all philosophies and mysteries, that you may come to Jesus only. Trust in Christ and you are saved. Receive this simple truth. God calls it great. Angels think it great. The Holy Spirit attests it to be great. We who preach it feel it to be great. They who receive it acknowledge it to be great. Christ in glory bears witness that it is great. O accept this great salvation! May the Spirit lead you to believe in the great Savior of great sinners.

Again, if it be so great, *how important it is for us to spread it!* It does not require us to go to college in order to tell of Jesus. We can each in our sphere publish His fame abroad. If this simple truth be the message of God to perishing sinners, then in the name of common humanity, and above all, in the name of the love of Christ, let us deliver it.

How this text ought to encourage us to spread the Gospel. When I am preaching the Gospel, many may say, “Oh, he is only telling us commonplace truth.” Just so, I know that, and yet I feel within myself as if I were wheeling up God’s great cannon which will yet blow the gates of hell to pieces yet.

What! none of the venerable mysteries of Rome? What, none of the new philosophical discoveries? None of the imposing ceremonies? No, brethren, not one of them, they are all wooden guns, shams and counterfeits, and if ever they are fired off they will go to shivers.

This plain truth, that “God was made flesh and dwelt among us,” is God’s great battering-ram against which nothing can stand. Never lose heart in the Gospel, my brethren, but think you hear the apostle calling across the ages, “Great is the mystery of godliness.” Look for nothing greater, the Gospel is great enough.

Keep to it, never think you have told men enough times about it. As Napoleon told his warriors at the pyramids, “A thousand ages look down upon you!” Bleeding martyrs who from their graves, call to you to be faithful. Confessors who ascended to heaven in fiery chariots, implore you to be steadfast. Hold fast that you have received! Attempt not to mend the truth, venture not to shape it according to the fancy of the times, but proclaim it in all its native purity.

By this hammer the gods of Rome and Greece were dashed to shivers, by this lever the world was turned upside down. It is this Gospel which has brought glory to God, filled heaven with redeemed souls, and made hell to tremble in all its palaces of flame.

Bind it about your heart, and defy the hosts of Rome or hell to unloose its folds. Wrap it about your loins in death, and hold it as a standard in both your hands in life. This simple truth, that “Jesus Christ has come to seek and to save that which is lost,” and that, “Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life,” must be your jewels, your treasure, your life.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
1 TIMOTHY 3:14-16 AND 1 TIMOTHY 4**

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.