

MARVELOUS, MYSTERIOUS TRUTH

1 Timothy 3:14-16

Truth is a precious, precious commodity, but oftentimes and sadly, it is a rare commodity in today's world. And we all want to know that we are being told the truth. But sometimes the truth hurts. I heard a story about a fourth grade teacher named Mrs. Fisher. Mrs. Fisher was recovering from surgery and got a get well card from her class that read, "Dear Mrs. Fisher, your fourth-grade class wishes you a speedy recovery by a vote of 15-14". Sometimes the truth hurts.

But sometimes telling the truth hurts. I read a story recently about an incident that happened years ago, just after the Communist revolution.

Shortly after the communist revolution, a spokesman for the party visited one of the peasant villages and began to promote communism. He said, "Thanks to the party, we have increased wheat production by 100 percent." One little man stood up in the back and said, "My name is Menski, and I would like to know where all that wheat is."

The next year the same official returned to the same village and began the same litany of propaganda, except in this case he said, "I want you to know by now we have increased the wheat production 200 percent." Little man in the back stood up and said, "My name is Menski, and I have one question. Where is all that wheat?"

Third year came. Same official approached these people and began his same talk. And he said, "The communist party has increased the wheat production 300 percent." Little fellow stood up in the back. And the official says, "I know, you're Menski, and..." The fellow responded, "No my name is Polaksi and I have a question. Where is Menski?"

So sometimes the truth hurts and sometimes telling the truth hurts, but sometimes not knowing the truth hurts. I have a friend in Pickens County who recently collapsed at home and stayed in the hospital for eleven days. And they came to find out that the reason was that she had been overmedicated. For some reason still undetermined she was taking twice as much heart medicine as the doctor prescribed, and she became extremely ill. But she found out the truth and is now back to her normal.

Today we are going to look at the greatest truth ever given to mankind. It is the truth of God's revelation of Himself. It is a marvelous, mysterious truth. But we are also going to see how important it is that we know this truth and proclaim it to all of the world. So turn in your Bibles, please, to 1 Timothy 1:14-16. In verse 15 of this short text Paul states the purpose of his letter to Timothy. He says that he writes so

Timothy might know how to conduct himself in the church of God. As we have said numerous times, how to do church. And in verse 15 he also tells Timothy, and us, where we must start. Paul says that we are the pillar and the ground of the truth, or the pillar and foundation of the truth. And we know that this truth is God's Holy Word.

So what does this mean, that the church is the pillar and ground for the truth? Bible teacher Harry Ironside pointed out that a pillar was for display purposes. And Timothy certainly would have picked up on this analogy, for where Timothy pastored in the city of Ephesus there was the magnificent temple of the heathen goddess Dianna, which had 127 pillars. What a display of beauty it must have been! But it was the display of a horrific, damning lie. But every church of the living God is to be a display of the beauty of God's marvelous truth. And of course, we are not talking about buildings. We are talking about human lives that have been redeemed by the grace of God and bound together by the Spirit of God as the body of Christ, His church. We are the visible evidence of the truth that God is real and that God makes a difference in people's lives.

But we are not only the pillar of the truth, but the foundation of the truth. We are the depository, the keeper for the eternal truths that God set forth before the foundation of the world and that will stand forever and ever (Isaiah. 40:8). We are the Ft. Knox of the Kingdom of God, but the treasure we guard is much more precious than gold which perishes.

Now, beloved, I could never overstate the importance of the church's task as the pillar and ground of the truth. Psalm 11:3 says, "If the foundations are destroyed, what will the righteous do?" We know what happens to a house when the foundation is destroyed. A few years ago we saw news clips of houses on the west coast just sliding off into the ocean because torrential rains had washed away their foundations. And the house of God, the church of the living God is no different. When the foundation of the Word crumbles so does the church. The building may still be there and the people may still be there, but the gospel light has been snuffed out and the church might as well close its doors! For this reason the book of 2 Peter was written primarily to refute false teachers who had infiltrated the church, and the book of Jude even more so. John writes in 3 John 4 "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth". And Jesus also weighs in on the importance of knowing the truth. Listen to Matt. 6:22-23:

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

The context of these verses deal with the proper perspective of material wealth. And Jesus says that if you miss the truth on money it will corrupt your entire way of

life. James says that you will pierce yourself though with many sorrows. But Jesus' illustration holds for all of the truth of God. To miss God's truth is to live in great darkness of His great purpose of your life and preparation for your eternity.

There is a very dangerous movement going on right now in the church in America that is a good example of what it means to lose the foundation of the truth. It is called the Emerging Church, and it is a loose affiliation of churches that among other things are breaking away from the moors of the traditional Christian faith. One of their leaders wrote in Christianity Today magazine, "I don't think we've got the gospel right yet....I don't think the liberals have it right. But I don't think we have it right either. None of us have arrived at orthodoxy". Now, this man is a man of influence. He's written numerous books and is a well-traveled speaker. And what he is saying is that orthodox Christians - we Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Church of God folks - we don't understand the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now beloved, that's scary. Not that we don't get the gospel right, because we do. But it's scary that a man with such a hearing says we don't. And now as much as ever before the church of God must do as Jude exhorts us and contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Do you remember what Paul says is the first piece of the armor of God that we should put on? "Stand therefore, having your loins girded about with truth". Jesus said, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free".

I want to ask you something. When a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon missionary knocks on your door, does just a little bit of anxiety begin to well up in your stomach, because you really don't know why you believe what you believe and you can't locate any Scripture to support it? Or do you sometimes entertain thoughts that those folks are really our brothers in Christ, though misguided just a bit? If a co-worker asked you if a sincere follower of the Christian Science faith would go to Heaven, what would you tell them?

Well may I say to you that though many people think that they are, none of these are our brothers. We love them and we seek to win them to faith in Jesus, but they are not our brothers. They are those that Peter spoke of in 2 Peter 2 who secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (2 Peter 2:1,17).

Now, you may be asking, "But how do we know this?" For some of these people will tell you in a heartbeat that they believe in Jesus, and go so far as to say that He is their Savior, and furthermore they can be the most moral people and the nicest people in the world. Beloved, we know the false professors in Christ because we know the truth. And no matter what a man or woman says about their faith in Jesus or how gracious and kind they may be, if their so-called faith in Jesus does not square up with God's truth about faith in Jesus they are unbelievers, they are false professors. But this begs another question. Just what is the essential truth of the

Christian faith, of which the church is the foundation? Well, Paul is glad that you asked! And in v. 16 he gives you the answer. It is the most comprehensive yet succinct statement of the mission of Jesus you will ever read. I want us to look at it for the remainder of our time this morning.

Now, the first thing that I want us to notice about the essentials of our faith is that it is a mystery. That is, it is hidden truth that makes no sense to the natural mind. It is so mysterious that unbelievers ridicule those of us who believe it as being simple minded and arrogant. But because it is a mystery, it can only be revealed by the Holy Spirit. And Paul actually wraps them up all in one package and labels them the mystery of godliness. And that is the mystery of God's program for mankind's salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. And this mystery has six parts.

The first part of the mystery is that God was manifested in the flesh. Oh, what an unfathomable mystery! That the Creator would condescend to become just like one of His creatures. And Jesus was not just a phantom that looked like a man. He was fully man yet still fully God. John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". Friend, to be a Christian is to believe in the Deity of Christ.

Now, there are many children who have never heard of the Deity of Christ at the time of their conversion, but they will still not question it. I have talked to scores and scores of children about their salvation, and I will tell them that Jesus was God's Son Who died on the cross for their sins. And then I will tell them that Jesus is actually God as well, that we don't understand it, but that He was. And not once have I ever had a child to say, "There's no way that Jesus can be the Son of God and God at the same time". God just puts it into their hearts to know that it is true. And what a truth! God has come down to earth that man might rise to Heaven! Do you believe that God was manifested in the flesh?

But there is a second part of the great mystery of godliness that we see. Paul says that God, or Jesus, was justified in the Spirit. That is, Jesus was vindicated, He was declared righteous by the Holy Spirit. Beloved, this is huge. Men, what would you think if you were docking your bass boat after fishing all day and an acquaintance of yours came up to you and said with all seriousness, "Follow me and I'll make you a fisher of men"? Ladies, what would you think if that happened to you as you were loading up your trunk in the Walmart parking lot? You'd most likely think, "Just let me get in my car and get out of here as fast as I can". And I would, too.

Well, that is exactly what Jesus said to Peter and Andrew, but His words were different. They had power. They were magnetic to those whom He called. And it was because Jesus was justified in the Spirit. From the time of His baptism when the Holy Spirit descended as a dove upon Him, everything that He did and said had the Spirit's anointing upon it. When He spoke, the people said, "No man ever spoke like this man" (John. 7:46). When He healed, the people said, "He has done all things well" (Mark. 7:37). When Jesus declared Himself to be the Son of God people said

“Yes, I believe”, and worshipped him (John. 9:38). All because Jesus was justified in the Spirit.

But there have been other miracle workers and other magnetic teachers who were charlatans, Satan’s emissaries masquerading as angels of light. And they have convinced many to follow them. How do we know that Jesus was different? Because Romans 8:11 tells us that it was by the Holy Spirit that Jesus was raised from the dead. Beloved, if Jesus were a charlatan then when He died and was buried the Holy Spirit would have certainly said, “O.K. Jesus, game’s over”, and left Him in the grave, just like all the other false prophets of the ages. But the Spirit didn’t do that. Paul writes in Romans 1:4 that the Holy Spirit declared Jesus to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.

So as Christians we don’t just take Jesus’ word alone that He was the Son of God, we have the blessed confirmation of the Holy Spirit.

But there is a third part of this mystery of godliness that we guard as the truth. And that is, Jesus was seen of angels. Now, angels have always played a huge part in the program of God. They were messengers to many of His children, both in the OT and NT. It was an angel that rescued Lot from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was through angels that God gave the law to Moses. When Isaiah saw his vision of the Lord, angels were all around. The writer of Hebrews says that at this moment angels are ministering to every child of God (Heb. 1:14). One of our own members told me a few years ago that he is convinced that he has seen an angel, who came and ministered to him. One day there will be a great war in the heavens when Michael and the angels will do battle with Satan and all of his demons and cast them out of the heavens down to the earth. Where God is at work, there you will find angels.

When Jesus called Nathaniel to follow Him, He told him an interesting thing. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (John 1:51). Jesus said that angels would be constantly observing or ministering to Him. And when you carefully examine Jesus’ life you see this was true.

Hebrews 1:6 says that at His birth the angels worshipped Him, and we know that they also filled the midnight sky and cried out, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men”. What a mystery! The Bible tells us that when Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil that angels ministered to Him (Mark 1:13). In the Garden of Gethsemane angels came and strengthened Jesus in His battle for our souls (Luke 22:43). Angels were present at His resurrection, rolling the stone away (Matthew 28:2). And angels attended His ascension, telling His followers that He would return in the same manner as they saw Him leave (Acts 1:9-11). And we read in Revelation 5 that the angels will be around

Jesus' throne crying out with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" Beloved, all of Heaven's focus is on Jesus!

May I say to you that Heaven's focus should be my focus; it should be your focus. If the holy angels of God focused on the Son of God, so should we. Jesus Himself said, "I have come that they might have life and it more abundantly". There is no purpose and no peace in life apart from Jesus. And if this world only had the focus of Heaven it would miss heartaches of hell. Because Paul writes that we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us (Romans 8:37). I ask you, where is your focus today?

But let me point out something we must not miss. There was one event in Jesus' life that the angels missed. And that was Calvary. We read of no angel being there. There were no words of encouragement for Jesus as He suffered for you and for me, there was not even a ministry of the angels' presence. And oh, what a sad day for the angels! They had attended Jesus since the day they were created, but that day the Father said to them, "Turn your back on Him. Leave Him alone." That too, is an unspoken part of the mystery of godliness.

But let's move on to yet another part of the mystery of godliness. Paul said that Jesus was preached among the Gentiles. And to many first century Jews this was indeed a great mystery. For Jesus' first followers were Jews, and Jews hated the Gentiles. One prominent Jew in biblical days declared that Gentiles were created to fuel the fires of hell. In the 1st century Jewish males got up every morning and thanked God that they were not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. If a Jew married a Gentile their family considered them dead and conducted their funeral. So it was a mystery indeed to Jesus' disciples when He told them to go and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). But in just a few short years those Gentile haters had so pervasively spread the message of Jesus to the Gentiles that they were accused of turning the whole world upside down (Acts 17:6). What another glorious mystery!

And that brings us to the next part of the mystery of godliness. And that is that after Jesus was preached among the Gentiles, they actually believed on Him. Think about this for a moment. Jesus was born in a humble carpenter's family. He was dogged with the charge of being illegitimate His whole life, so He certainly had no lineage or wealth to build upon as a religious leader. Jesus never wrote a book or held an office. For the last 3½ years of His life He was an itinerant preacher who was basically homeless. Except for a small number of followers at the end, the entire world considered Him a failure at best or a fraud at worst, and He was publicly executed as the worst of criminals then buried in a borrowed tomb. And yet 2000 years later 2.1 billion people claim Him to be their God. How can this be? It is an unsolvable mystery apart from the mighty power of God!

May I say to you that this glorious mystery of Jesus being believed on in the world is still coming to pass every day? No matter the culture, no matter the race, no matter the level of education, when hungry, empty souls hear the sweet, sweet story of Jesus and the Holy Spirit pierces them with conviction that the story is true, those precious souls still believe on Him and He transforms their lives just as He did 2000 years ago! If you've been saved you can testify to this. Because you heard the gospel of Christ one day and you felt something deep down in your soul saying, "This is true! Believe it and be saved!" And you knew what it was. It was the voice of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said of the Holy Spirit in John 16:8-9;

"And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they do not believe in Me, of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and you see me no more, and of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged".

Oh, what a glorious mystery! That this very day people all over the world will place the faith in Jesus and be forgiven from sin and delivered from a life of misery and destruction and given joy unspeakable and full of glory in their souls, just like it happened to people who encountered Jesus face to face. Has this mystery ever happened to you?

The final part of the mystery of godliness – Jesus was received up in glory.