

MESSAGE 2 – The greatest mystery of all.

There are numerous times the word “mystery” appears in the Scriptures. Paul uses the word 20 times in his letters, 17 times as the word “mystery” and 3 times as the word “mysteries”, and so thusly I would tend to say that this word is somewhat important in his letters. Each time he refers to a mystery, it is something that has yet to be fully revealed, as well as it is something that not all men are able to receive. It is quite an interesting study when you place them all side by side, but you need not be a great student of the Bible to notice that out of those 20 times Paul uses the word mystery, the Holy Spirit impressed upon him to call two of them, and only two, GREAT mysteries. The word “great” is the Greek word, get this, MEGA. This is a mega mystery, says Paul. Now what is meant by that we are not left to wonder either, because other places in the Scriptures, this word “mega” is translated as “exceeding”, “loud”, “large”, and “mighty”.

And so we have many mysteries in the Scriptures, but only two are called great and of those two only one is the mystery itself called “great”. I cannot tell you why the Holy Spirit denotes these two as “great”, but they must be the two deepest mysteries in the Bible otherwise they would not be denoted as GREAT. The first one is found in 1 Timothy 3:16 and while the words “great” and “mystery” appear together here, it is not the mystery itself that is called great, it is the “mystery of godliness” that is called great.

1 Timothy 3:16, *“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, received up into glory.”*

Godliness is a great mystery. It always has been and always will be. Paul listed several reasons here what makes godliness such a great mystery.

First, because God was manifest in the flesh. You have heard the expression “still waters run deep”, well here we have 6 words, but the meaning that lies under the surface is deeper than we can ever imagine or ever grasp. John Flavel once said, *“He that undertakes to satisfy God, by obedience for man’s sins, must Himself be God. And He that performs such a perfect obedience, by doing, and suffering all the law required, in our room, must be man”*. And so we see that only God, and only God as Man, could satisfy His requirement for justice served due to sin.

In becoming flesh, the Godhead did not change what It was, but rather assuming something It was not, and this is where the mystery of it all comes in. How can the flesh be holy, how can Someone in the flesh be holy, be sinless without sin, perfect and pure in the sight of God in every manner? Great is this mystery of godliness, that God Himself was manifest in the flesh.

It is appalling to say or to even think that Jesus Christ was but a mere man, or but a mere prophet like some of the worlds religions believe today. This is the worse sort of insult and blasphemy and yet we are so very tolerant of it. Muslims, for instance, are one of the religions that believe Jesus was a mere prophet, a man of peace, but a man nonetheless. And yet we are supposedly a Christian nation based upon Christian values, which is course we are not, but yet we tolerate blasphemous religions like these to thrive. Any religions, any person, any doctrine that teaches ANYTHING other than that God was manifest in the flesh, and that It was in the Person of Jesus Christ is a damned religion, is a blasphemous lie straight out of the pit of hell! And I for one, resent it, I for one will stand against it until my last breath and tell men that believe such things that they are not my friend, or my brother, and I held them in the highest disregard, and you ought to do the same.

Second, God was justified in the Spirit. He was first manifested in the flesh, in the Form of the Man, Christ Jesus, and He was justified in the Spirit once He manifested Himself in the flesh. Now at first you might ask yourself “why would God need to be justified”, or “why would Jesus Christ need justification”? Well the simple and clear answer to that is that He doesn’t, but we do. God has always required a sacrifice for sin, even moreso, He has always required a pure sacrifice for sin. The animals sacrificed never brought about justification, for the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin.

It was blood that God required for justification and the only way that man could ever be eternally, once for all, justified in the sight of God would be if pure, sinless, untainted human blood was sacrificed for the sins of man. Just as the sin of one condemned man, the justification of One saved man, thusly it is a spiritual justification which God has applied to us through the meritorious gift of Christ upon Calvary. In the book of Job we find this question of Bildad the Shuhite found in Job 25:4-6, “*How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?*”

Now that is a good question. Bildad the Shuhite had the right concept of mankind as well as the right concept of God. God is Sovereign, He can do as He pleases, but He is also bound by His Word, and He has declared that all have sinned and come short of His glory. He has declared that tainted, sinful blood courses through our veins and that that blood is not an acceptable sacrifice in His Eyes. He has declared that an animal sacrifice could never justify you in His sight, but it would be accepted by God as a temporary forgiveness of sin. And with this knowledge, I like, Bildad the Shihite ask, “how then can a man be justified in the sight of God? And so let us see what Job answer was to Bildad the Shuhite.

It took Job the next 161 verses to explain to Bildad the answer, I suggest you read it sometime. It is the longest response to any of the questions ever presented to him. We have the benefit of a 1 verse response, yea, a one line response, and it is found here in 1 Tim 3:16, He was justified in the Spirit, by becoming Christ and we have spiritually, through the Spirit, become One with Him, and the justification He performed upon Calvary for you and I, are ours through the Spirit. Answer this one question: what is different between you and your neighbor? What is the one difference between you and any unregenerate? We sill sin, we still have sinful thoughts and actions, we still ignore God at times, there is little difference between us and the world except for this one monumental thing: we have the Spirit of God living in us.

Job did not have the knowledge the Spirit living in us that we do today, but even he said in Job 19:25, “I know my redeemer liveth”. In Job’s 161 verse response, he could do little more than state God’s wondrous attributes and that basically his response was that God will do what is Right in His own sight.

Thirdly, He was seen of angels. We just recently finished our PC studies in the book of Hebrews, and in the first chapter of this most blessed letter, Paul speaks of the relationship of angels to God as He appeared in the Form of Man. They worshipped Him (Heb 1:6) and His inheritance was to be far above the angles. All through His life here upon earth, Jesus Christ had the full attention of all the heavenly hosts of angels. They attended his incarnation, his temptation, his agony, his death, his resurrection, his ascension; this is much to his honour, and shows what a mighty interest he had in the upper world, that angels ministered to him, for he is the Lord of angels.

He had full control over the angels as was manifested in His words from Matthew 26:53, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” The angels were not watching over Him for His protection but rather, I believe, to view Deity in the flesh. How remarkable it must have been for them to see One born of a woman, live a life of a Man, die the death of a martyr, live in a world of sin, and yet never once did sin encompass Him! Never once did sin touch His soul, affect His mind, influence His actions, and for this, I believe the angels, and the seraphims remarked in Isaiah 6:3, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.”

Certainly this was a great mystery to them as well as to us. I cannot understand our saviour could have lived in this world and yet never have partaken of the sin that so gripped this world. Never did any other thought propel Him other than to do the will of the Father. That was His goal, that was His work. He was so holy that we could not even touch the hem of His garment, and yet He was so appalling to us that we had Him take out and crucified. And brethren, you and I are both as guilty of crucifying Him as the Roman soldiers were on that day, for we have partaken of sin, we have partaken and enjoyed that which caused our Saviour to be nailed upon the cross of Calvary.

Fourth, He was preached unto the Gentiles. This is part of the great mystery for it never was God's intention to have His Son save only the nation of Israel. There is no doubt that the Jews were a favored people by God, there is no doubt that they turn away from Him time and time again, there is no doubt that God showed His longsuffering time after time after time with these stubborn people, and yet in the fullness of time, the promised Messiah was born of a woman, came unto His own, and by the fore ordaining of God, His own received Him not. They were then cut off, fractured from God if you wish, and it was in part due to the fact that His Word had gone out to the Gentiles.

The Jewish nation never saw that coming, even though it was prophesied, it remained a great mystery to them, just as did the resurrection. That God would call Gentiles unto Himself beginning with Cornelius, and then the calling out of the apostle Paul. The apostle Paul preached Christ unto the Gentiles and what he preached was even a mystery to Peter himself, as he wrote in 2 Peter 3:15-16, "...even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." And I have much more to say on this as we get into the next great mystery.

Fifthly, He was believed on in the world, that is, in both the world of the Jews and of the Gentiles as well. "For God so loved the world", John 3:16, you all know it, it is an Armenians favorite verse, but the "world" here does not mean everyone and everything in the world, but simply means the world of both Jew and Gentile. He was believed on by both and while this may not seem like a great mystery to us, it is recorded here as one of the great mysteries of godliness. How His holiness extended over to both worlds, how His love transcended both Jew and Gentile line, how in His death, the veil betwixt the two was torn.

It is nothing short of a miracle that God ordained both Jew and Gentile to receive salvation through His Son's death upon the cross. How the death of the promised Messiah, the One promised to Israel could save all nations, and even here some 2000 years later with the walls broken down, we still enjoy the fruits of our Saviour's labor here on earth.

And finally, He was received up into glory. This being His resurrection, which was the greatest show of God's power ever to have been displayed. All the things Jesus Christ spoke regarding Himself while He was here upon earth were manifested as true upon His resurrection. He was Who He said He was, and the Scriptures clearly tell us that He was "raised for our justification". The tomb could not contain Him because He was pure Deity, He was God incarnate, and as He perished upon Calvary He commended His Spirit into the Hands of God.

I can only imagine how long the three days must have seemed to the angels in heaven. But on that third day, He victoriously burst forth from the tomb and we hear those glorious words of hope, "He is not here, He is risen". "He is not here, He is risen". What great hope this gave all mankind and it is the greatest hope that will ever be known to man, that God raised His Son from the dead, and that in doing so, He defeated death. He defeated sin in His life and He defeated death in His death.

And so we have a complete picture here of the Life of our Saviour until His death and it was a life of godliness. It began with God being manifested in the flesh, and it ends with Him being raised up into glory.

The second great mystery is found in Ephesians 5:30-32, "*For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*"

This great mystery is somewhat different from the one in 1 Tim 3:16 whereas here it is the mystery itself which is great, not the subject of the mystery, but the mystery itself. The godliness of God is GREAT, but here this says that the mystery is great. In other words, the mystery of the church's relationship to Christ is hid from a great many. If you give it some thought, you will see that the meanings are somewhat different, and it is hard to put into words other than to say that godliness is a mystery that stays with God for it is a

great, grand thing, whereas the mystery of the Body is given to us to know as it is the greatest mystery known to man.

I know that there are some here today that still may not have fully grasped what this mystery is. We know the words, we have an idea of what the Body of Christ is, but do not fully appreciate the greatness of this mystery. The relationship of Jesus Christ to us today far exceeds that of the nation of Israel. We are called “members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones”, and as such we have a closeness to Him that cannot be found anywhere else in time or in Scripture. Now I have read numerous commentaries on this verse as I believe that most of them have missed the point here. One states that this mystery is the love Christ has for His own, one took the Latin Vulgate translation of the word mystery which they changed to “sacrament”, and was convinced this verse spoke of the ritual of communion. Another took the Latin Vulgate and said that this was where the Roman Catholic church got the sacrament of marriage. Many others wrote that this mystery was the union between Christ and His elect.

There is no doubt that this passage and this mystery speaks of the union between a believer and His Saviour, that cannot be denied, but what is it that makes this mysterious union so great? I believe that what makes this mystery a great mystery, a mega mystery, is that the union between Christ and His body is unlike any that had ever existed before, up to and including the Acts period, and therefore there was nothing to compare to it.

We know that the nation of Israel were referred to frequently as the bride of Christ, and here we are referred to as members of His body. If truth be told, there is not much of a difference there if you think about it. If Israel were to be the bride, and He the Husband, then they too become One with Christ upon the marriage, and so this was something that the nation of Israel understood, this is not something that is unique to the present day church. In other words, the union is not the great mystery, but rather the relationship is. Let me state that again, the great mystery here is not and cannot be our union with Christ for the nation of Israel would enjoy that as well during the kingdom reign, but the great mystery is the new relationship formed between Christ and His body. In order for it to be a great mystery something must have changed. In order for it to be a great mystery, something must have changed.

This was a relationship that transcended time, this was a relationship that was, according to Ephesians 1:4, “chosen in him before the foundation of the world.” And so then what does this mean? What about the relationship to Christ and His body is so unique? So unique that the apostle Paul was compelled by the Holy Spirit to state that it was a GREAT mystery? Now according to Romans 11:25, the Gentiles being grafted into the olive tree was a mystery, but that is not and can not be the same thing as this GREAT mystery spoken of here.

Now you need to get that, because Paul states in Romans that the grafting in of the Gentiles was a mystery, but the relationship of the Body to Christ is a GREAT mystery. And what I take that to mean is this: the Body of Christ and our present day relationship to Him is a mystery to a great many people, thusly making it a great mystery. How many people do you know that understand anything about the Body of Christ? This mystery of the Body of Christ is the greatest mystery in all of Scripture, and it is even called that by Paul, those are his words, not mine.

Now just because it may remain a mystery to some doesn't mean that you cannot be saved, for I believe that God only reveals mysteries to saved people. God renews your mind first, and gives you a mind to receive these mysteries spoken of throughout the Bible, but He has reserved the greatest mystery of them all to reveal to the apostle Paul after the Acts period had ended. The term “mystery” implies something that was not known before, and as we saw in Romans 11, the mystery of the Gentiles being grafted in was revealed and therefore this MUST be something different which Paul is here referring to. I have read multitudes of commentaries on this passage of Scripture, and almost every single one of them does not pick up on this word “great”.

Would you not want to know that greatest and grandest mystery of all time, according to the Scriptures? Well here it is: Christ and the church. What makes this such a great mystery is that the things associated with it had never before been revealed. And here is the interesting thing: I can tell you what it is, Ken can

tell you what it is, you can even read it for yourself, but God must reveal it to you in order for it to have any meaning to you. But it begins with carefully reading and understanding the book of Ephesians, for this is where the Holy Spirit begins to reveal this mystery to us, the present day church.

So let us look at this relationship for a moment and see why it remains as such as mystery. Turn with me to Eph 3:1-10.

As if we need reason to love Him more other than because of Who He is, the Scriptures give us a plethora of information about our Saviour, a vast amount of descriptions and shadows and types and stories which we can draw from, and when we read and study and meditate upon them the more and more, the more absolute and sinless He appears in your sight. The Scriptures are too vast to plum in one lifetime, let alone one study, but we can examine but a few things regarding His loveliness this morning, and that will be His crucifixion and His resurrection, for that is the gospel which will save your soul. That is the gospel that will renew your mind, that will cause you to fall in love with your Saviour. If you know the story, listen again, for a believer will never tire of it.

As our Saviour hung upon Calvary, we need not look any further than the first words spoken by Him. He was as a lamb brought to the slaughter, He opened not His mouth before His captures. He did not defend Himself, even during the smiting and the stripes He endured, He uttered not a word. But now upon Calvary, we hear Him speaking, and we notice first and foremost than He is speaking to His Father, not to man. We were not worthy to be addressed by Him, neither should we even have been worthy to hear the words that came forth from His sinless, precious mouth. But we are privileged to hear those words and they are "Father forgive them for they know not what they do"!

Listen to those words, because what is so amazing is that they are words prayed on our behalf! They are words that are prayed for us, for those that have just finished beating and mocking and spitting at Him. Those are words for those so called friends of His that have fled, that have betrayed Him, and that have even cursed His Name. Oh how unlike Jesus Christ we are. How can you not fall in love with the Godman as you hear those words come forth!? How could you not, had you been there on that day, not ran forth and flung yourself at His Feet begging to replace Him upon the cross. Oh but there was to be none of that on that day, but rather upon hearing those words, all the more people simply sat down to watch. They sat down as if they wanted to be entertained.

It is taken for granted that Jesus Christ forgave them by His Words to the Saviour. I have neighbors that I don't forgive because they let their dogs out in our yard! Can you imagine how that pales in comparison to what we have before us today? A renewed mind will see the fallacy in your lives, will see the hypocrisy and will strive to be more Christlike. Here the Son of God had already forgiven them, and it is not a token forgiveness, He forgave them to the point where the actions of those men never even happened in His mind. He had forgiven them but now He is more concerned about the fact that they offended His heavenly Father more than Himself, and now He asks His Father to forgive them as well. With this type of unnatural benevolence towards man, we can begin to understand and get a slight glimpse at how God the Father can forgive us for our transgressions against Him.

Do you see what a soul of compassion the Lord Jesus Christ has? Do you see what type of forgiving heart was within Him? These are reasons to love Him more. We read later where both Stephen and Paul prayed that the sins of their accusers not be laid to their charge, but where did they get this from if not from the glorious Substitute Himself. Where did Jesus Christ get this from? Nowhere, it was within His own self to say these words, as they were words He meant and words that originated within His very own mind, heart, and soul.

And just as He prayed for His enemies upon the cross, He is now still praying for His enemies, but upon the Throne. We were at one time His enemies, enemies of the cross. You defiled Him with your thoughts, with your intentions, with your language, with every fiber of your being, you disgraced Him. You were

born a sinner, you were born with an unrenewed heart and mind, one that sought trouble as the sparks fly upwards, and had our Saviour hot prayed for your forgiveness, it would never have come! Jesus Christ sought you out, yea before the foundation of the world, you were chosen in Him, but it is only because He sought you out. HE beseeched the Father on your account, He asked the Father for forgiveness for you, for you knew not what you had done. And you found mercy from God, and that is something that can never be forgotten, not even out yonder in eternity, and this is but one more reason to love the Son of God.

We are very much like those present on that day, for they did not ask the Saviour to pray for them, it would have been the furthest thing from their minds to ask the Son of God as He perished to ask forgiveness for them. And yet He did. And we learn from this, that His forgiveness is the last thing that we seek. We do not want His forgiveness nor do we even ask for it out of a genuinely repentent heart. Oh no, God must renew your mind first, He must make you alive, give you life through the resurrection of His Son, and then and only then does a true repentance begin.