

The Person Of Christ

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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)

What we have before us tonight is the mystery of godliness, the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. This mystery has been revealed by God through the ministry of the apostle Paul to His dear people.

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness..."

Although the apostle said it was great, and there was no controversy about it, it is, however, beyond human comprehension and so it can only be revealed to faith. I once had dinner with a couple, the wife being saved, and the unbelieving husband said to me, "Mr Costen, I do not understand the gospel". I said, "Mr _____, I do not understand it either! I do not have to understand it, but I apprehend it." There is a difference between apprehension and comprehension. If we had to *comprehend* the gospel, how many of us would enter into anything in the word of God? Not one of us would. But we *apprehend*, we lay hold of these things by faith and go on our way rejoicing, so this mystery of godliness is beyond comprehension. Let us now consider the mystery of godliness.

"...God was manifest in [the] flesh..."

This is the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must omit the word "the" because although He became flesh and blood, being born in Bethlehem's manger of a virgin (Matt.1), there was nothing in Him that represented "the flesh" because "He knew no sin" (2 Cor.5:21), "He did no sin" (1 Pet.1:22) and "in Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5). The Lord Jesus *could not sin*, not just as God, but as Man, the Man Christ Jesus, the "second man... from heaven" (1 Cor.15:47); *He could not sin*. Let us now consider the reasons for the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The primary reason was to do the will of God, "Lo, I come (in the volume of the book [the book of God's councils] it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God" (Heb.10:7). Sometimes we say the primary reason was to die on the cross, but primarily the reason why the Lord Jesus came into the world was to do the will of God. Psalm 40:8 says, "I delight to do thy will, O my God". The Holy Spirit prepared Him a body for Him to come into this scene to do the will of God, "a body hast thou prepared me" (Heb.10:5).

Another reason He came into this world was to reveal the Father (John 1:18). He came to declare the Father, to reveal the Father's heart and the Father's love. There is a difference between the love of the Father and the love of God. The love of God goes out to saint and sinner, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not

perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16), it is the love of mercy, of compassion, He sees us in our need and He meets that need. The Father's love is a love of complacency, the Father dearly loves the saints because they love Christ, it is a different kind of love, it is a love of satisfaction, God is satisfied with Jesus, and so is satisfied with all who have been "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph.1:6). So how good of the Father to know that the Lord Jesus came down to reveal that heart and love, but also the Father's house. "In my Father's house are *many* mansions" (John 14:2), there is a mansion for Israel, a mansion for the church, a mansion for tribulation saints, a mansion for the various families of martyrs, a mansion for millennial saints. There is going to be family after family, intelligence after intelligence echoing the glory of God by that Man Christ Jesus in that soon coming day. The apostle Paul could say, "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom every family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph.3:14-15 JND). The Father's house is the universe, and the Lord Jesus, when He comes back, is going to fill that whole universe of bliss with God's glory.

Another reason He came was to put away SIN (I do not say SINS) by the sacrifice of Himself. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that is true and wonderful, but He came to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the *sin* of the world" (John 1:29). Dear fellow believer, the sin has not been taken away yet, there is still sin in the world, the hospital and the cemetery tell us that, but as far as God is concerned, it has been. Christ, in His work on the cross, has borne away from God's holy eye all that is offensive to God and now God can come out in blessing to His creatures. It will be completely done away at the end of the millennium, but, as far as God is concerned, the death of Christ on the cross of Calvary has borne away the sin of the world *now*.

Another reason He came into this scene is seen in Mark 2:17 where the Lord said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance". So if you are a sinner tonight, boy or girl, man or woman, if you know you are a lost sinner, the Lord Jesus has come to call you unto Himself. You can come to the Lord Jesus Christ as a sinner and repent of your sins and take Him as your own personal Saviour and leave here rejoicing knowing your sins are forgiven.

Another reason He came was to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). In every dealing with Satan He bound the strong man and spoiled his goods (Matt.12:29). Being tempted He said "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt.4:4). As a Man He was dependent upon the word of God, He bound the strong man and spoilt his goods. He also cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9). But when the Lord Jesus Christ died on Calvary's cross, sin, death, hell and Satan, were all vanquished by His work.

Satan did not want the Lord Jesus to die on a cross. Satan, in the form of the serpent, heard in the garden of Eden that his head was going to be bruised (Gen.3:15) and so when Christ was born Herod killed all the children under two years of age (Matt.2:16). When the Lord Jesus came out in public testimony He went into the synagogue, and, as His custom was, the minister handed him the book and he read from it and they "wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth" (v.22), but then the Lord Jesus touched their hearts, saying, "many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elijah sent, save unto Sarepta, a

city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong" (vv.25-29). Satan energised that because he did not want the Lord Jesus to die as a sacrifice. He knew that if Christ died as a sacrifice for sin he would be defeated, his time would be short. "But he passing through the midst of them went his way" (v.30). On a different occasion he tried to drown the Lord, He did not want Him to die on Calvary's cross. Just before He was nailed to Calvary's cross Christ was scourged (Mark 15:15, Isa.52:14), His back was like a ploughed field, deep furrows were made on His back (Ps.129:3). Why? Because the devil wanted the Lord Jesus to die any other way rather than for Him to offer Himself as a sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. Satan, once the Lord Jesus did that, was defeated. Satan does not have the same power over the believer as he did before he believed, "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). How wonderful to know that and to know that Satan has been defeated.

Another reason He came into Manhood was to bring "many *sons* (not sinners) to glory" (Heb.2:10). It is true that we are sinners, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners", of whom Paul could say "of whom I am chief" (1 Tim.1:15), and we too can quote the same Scripture verse, but we are *not* going to be there as *sinners*, we are going to be there as *sons*, in the dignity of sonship. We do not have to wait until we get there to exercise this sonship, we are in the dignity of sonship *now* (Gal.4:4-7), and on Lord's day morning, when we break bread, we do so as His brethren in the dignity of sonship, not as sinners, although that is all we were and are. If we are just occupied with our sins it becomes a 'believer's supper' instead of "the Lord's supper" where He is the object, His work, His worth, His praise and what He means to God the Father, so He brings "many *sons* to glory". I trust everyone here tonight is going to glory; if you are not going to glory then trust the Lord Jesus as your Saviour and when He comes He will take you to glory to be with Himself.

We could mention many other reasons why the Lord Jesus Christ came into Manhood, but even when He came into Manhood He upheld "all things by the word of his power" (Heb.1:3). He upholds the universe. Think of that! Our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, upholds the universe. So that is the first thing we have in this verse, "God was manifest in flesh".

".....*justified in the Spirit*....."

Every act, every word, every deed, every miracle, every parable, everything that the Lord Jesus did as a Man the Holy Spirit justified, He put His stamp of approval on it. At the Lord's baptism the Spirit of God descended upon Him in the form of a dove (Luke 3:22). He came preaching peace (Acts 10:36) and His voice was not even heard in the street (Isa.42:2) except "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)" (John 7:37-39). So the Lord Jesus was justified by (or in) the Spirit.

The book of Romans is often called 'the gospel of God', and so we would certainly be justified by saying 'Let us turn to the Gospel of Romans because this is what the Roman Epistle is. This gospel is "Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (1:3-4). This is not the Lord's resurrection but rather it is the three people He personally raised.

- Firstly, He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (Luke 8:49-56),

- secondly, He touched the coffin of a young man while he was being taken to the cemetery and gave him back to his mother (Luke 7:12-15), and

- thirdly, He called Lazarus from the dead after he had been in the grave four days (John 11).

So the Holy Spirit, after He reviewed the earthly life of the One who came according to the seed of David, according to the flesh, said that this One was the Son of God with power because He raised people from the dead; He proved His credentials. So Christ was justified in every aspect of His life on earth by the blessed Holy Spirit. What a wonderful One we have to consider, every word that He uttered the Spirit of God put His stamp of approval on. Would to God that everything we did or said could be justified by the Spirit of God and it can be, if we are occupied with that Man Christ Jesus.

For a text turn to Genesis 41:38, "And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?" None could compare to Joseph, none could be found like him. Joseph was given a new name, Zaphnath-paaneah, and in Egyptian this means 'Saviour of the world', but in Hebrew it means 'Revealer of secrets'. Dear friends, our Joseph, our Zaphnath-paaneah, our Saviour of the world, our Revealer of secrets, is none other than the Lord of glory, the Lord Jesus Christ, and just as the Spirit of God was in Joseph the Holy Spirit came upon the Lord Jesus at His baptism for public service, He was "Justified in (and by) the Holy Spirit". Noah let the dove out of the ark and he found his rest, as it were, on the Lord Jesus at His baptism coming in public testimony. At that particular instance we could quote the book of Isaiah "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down" (64:1), God waited thirty years for this event, the Holy Spirit waited thirty years for this event, the Lord Jesus patiently waited thirty years for this great event, then the heart of God could not be held back any longer and the heavens were opened, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt.3:17). What a Saviour and what a One that we have to consider, this One who is "God manifest in flesh" and "justified in the Spirit".

"...seen of angels..."

The angels had never seen the Lord Jesus before. They had had access to Him, they worshipped Him, but when He was born in Bethlehem's manger and a great host of angels welcomed Him saying "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). He had never been seen by angels before, but there they saw their Creator in a little baby in Bethlehem's manger. Think of the seraphim, "each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another,

and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa.6:2-3), and the cherubim having four wings (Ezek.10:20-21) guarding the righteousness of God. We are used to seeing pictures of angels being female but that is probably not what an angel looks like, but be that as it may, here the Lord Jesus was seen of angels.

They welcomed His birth, they ministered to Him (e.g. Mark 1:13), they ascended and descended upon the Son of man (John 1:51), and Hebrews 1:6 says, "when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him", and when He will come back into the world the second time the angels will worship Him then too. There is no salvation for angels though, so do not worry about the angels, you need to be saved yourself, you need to trust Christ as your Saviour. Angels desire to look into these things (1 Pet.1:12); angels are ministering spirits, and if one of our loved ones is called home the angels serve as pallbearers to take that soul and spirit right into the presence of God (Luke 16:22), they are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb.1:14).

But we do not want to be occupied with angels because we have a better occupation, the Man in the glory, the Man Christ Jesus. In the Old Testament Ezekiel, in his vision, saw an appearance of a man above on the throne (Ezek.1:26), but it was only a vision, now we do not have visions, we *by faith* look up and see that Man upon the throne crowned with glory, honour, majesty and splendour (Heb.2:9) with a royal diadem upon His head according to Psalm 21.

"...preached unto the Gentiles..."

Why does it not say 'preached unto the *Jews*'? The gospel was preached "to the Jew first" (Rom.1:16), and the one hundred and twenty believers in the upper room were Jews (Acts 1:15), the three thousand worshipping Jews that were there on the day of Pentecost were "Jews from every nation" (Acts 2:5), the lame man who was lain at the temple and was healed by Peter was a Jew, he received strength in his ankles (Acts 3:7); this is, as it were, "water to the ankles" (Ezek.47:3). Later on in the Acts we see Stephen kneeling (Acts 7:60), Peter in chapter 10 was praying (v.9), the apostle Paul in chapter 9:11 prayed (there is water "to the knees", Ezek.47:4a), but then in Cornelius and his household, Gentiles were being saved (Acts 10) (this is "water to the loins", Ezek.47:4b), and at Antioch we have a deluge, the floodgates were opened with the gospel going out to a thirsty Gentile world ("waters to swim in" - Ezek.47:5).

Paul could say in Ephesians 3:8 he was to "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ", Jewry could not contain the grace of God. Thank God for the Jews that are being saved, but primarily Gentiles are being saved. The apostle Paul (as seen in Acts 13 to the end) was the great apostle to the Gentiles (Rom.11:13), God has blessed Gentiles "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ" (Eph.1:3). This is why it says, "preached unto the Gentiles". Thank God for every one who has heard the gospel of God's grace.

The gospel is the gospel of the glory and is from above. The apostle said "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus Lord, and ourselves your bondmen for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor.4:5-6). The word "shine" and "light" is where we get our word "radiancy" from, so no wonder the apostle Paul could say he

saw a "light from heaven" (Acts 9:3), then later on "there shone from heaven a *great* light" (Acts 22:6), and then later on again when he was before Gentiles, "a light from heaven, *above the brightness of the [noonday] sun*" (Acts 26:13); the light just got brighter and brighter. So for us the gospel of the glory should grow brighter and brighter in our lives, and we too should preach the gospel of the glory to a thirsty Gentile world. There are plenty of such people here in this town and in every other town, so what an opportunity to preach the gospel of God's grace.

"...believed on in the world..."

This word "believed" does not mean to sign a card, it does not mean to come forward (although some people are saved when they come forward as an open confession of Christ and I am not saying anything against that, though it is not necessary, but if someone wants to do that then that is fine), rather this word "believe", used 99 times in John's Gospel, means to be 'fully persuaded'. Some of us were talking to a young man this afternoon in front of the chapel and he was not fully persuaded though he may have made a confession before, it may not have been a true confession, only God knows the heart. We pray for him that it might be a real confession, as he had some doubts, not being fully persuaded, and so our prayer is that that young man might be fully persuaded. Peter says, "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious" (1 Pet.2:7). Is the Lord Jesus precious to you my true fellow-believer? I trust that He is.

What a precious Saviour we have in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus said in John 9:35 to the man whom He had healed of his blindness after the Pharisees and scribes had thrown him out of the synagogue because of his confession, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" "He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" and there he was right at the feet of Jesus. That incident ended, as it were, the opportunity for the Jews, as a nation, to be saved. There were other pleadings, but after that the Lord Jesus in John 10 said, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" and "he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out" (vv.11,3). But leads them out of where? He led them out of the fold of Judaism, and together with Gentile believers, other sheep, made "one flock", there being "one shepherd" (v.16). That fold might provide safety, but there was no liberty to go in and out to find pasture (v.9), and so He called His disciples out. Once Christ was crucified, raised from the dead and ascended back to glory, the Spirit of God came and then they understood these things. So how wonderful it is that He was "believed on in the world".

".....received up into [or 'in'] glory."

A more literal translation is "*in* glory" rather than "*into* glory". Mankind took Christ outside the city and gave Him the most despicable, despised place in the universe, "And when they came to the place which is called Skull, there they crucified him" (Luke 23:33). This was where they burned the carcasses of animals that were sacrificed in the temple, they did not want Him, they said "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14), "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15), "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.)" (Luke 23:18-19), and "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt.27:25). The nation of Israel, the Romans and men generally gave

Him the very lowest place on earth, but God has given the Lord Jesus Christ the highest place in heaven, as there is no place in heaven too high for the Lord Jesus.

He has been received up in glory. What a glorious reception He received! Is it any wonder that Psalm 111 says "Hallelujah"? Is it any wonder that Psalm 112 says "Praise the Lord"? Is it any wonder that all of heaven should break forth in praise and adoration when the Lord Jesus, having finished the work of redemption, took His seat at God's right hand in unchallenged supremacy? In the book of Hebrews, having made purgation for sin, Christ sat Himself down personally because of Who He is, and what He has done on the cross of Calvary (1:3). Also He sat down at God's right hand by God's invitation "Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" (1:13). He sits down positionally above principalities and above angels. As the Minister of the sanctuary He is set down officially, He represents us (8:1-2).

Often we just think of the Lord interceding for us (and that is wonderful and precious), but there is another line of ministry, that He represents us at the very throne of God as the Minister of the Sanctuary, which is in relation to worship. Do you know why you were saved? Hebrews 9:1-10 gives a picture of magnificent furniture, incense and veils, and all of these beautiful things speak of Christ in the Tabernacle system, the Judaistic system which God ordained, now having been done away with at the cross, but look at verse 6 to get an application, "Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God". We are priests, and our purpose on earth is to accomplish, or perform, the service of God. This is not *Levitical* service, it is not winning souls, it is not giving out gospel tracts, it is not that sort of thing (important as they are), that comes next, but this is *Sanctuary* service, it is going into the very presence of God and worshipping Him. The service here is "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest ['the Holy of Holies'] by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way" (10:19-20a). This is why we have been saved, to perform Sanctuary service. After we have performed Sanctuary service, having been into God's presence we can come out and perform Levitical service. The Levites carried the ark on their shoulders, they bore the testimony, and so we are to lift Christ up high, carrying Him on our shoulders, not letting Him get dragged along in the mud as it were, but holding Him up high and telling a dying, lost world that He is the One who can save them, presenting the 'all together lovely One' to them in Levitical service. Preaching the gospel, giving out gospel tracts, visiting the sick, keeping ourselves unspotted from the world (Jas.1:27), that is Levitical service. Many of us want to perform Levitical service without performing Sanctuary service, but it just does not work, we have got to go into the presence of God for Sanctuary service, only then can we go out in Levitical service.

The Lord Jesus, before being received back up in glory, took His own to Bethany, "he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51). The reason He went to Bethany was because Jerusalem which now is, which we read of in the Bible and in our newspapers, "spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (Rev.11:8). It is not a holy land. When people talk about going to 'the holy land', we know what they are talking about, they want to go where Jesus walked and see Palestine, and that is fine if they want to take a trip, but it is an *unholy* land, it is guilty of the crucifixion of our

Lord Jesus Christ, and two thirds of all Jews living are going to be murdered during the tribulation period (Zech.13:8).

Why? Because of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus and because of their words "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt.27:25). The one third are going to come through the great tribulation, they will be gospel preachers of the kingdom and a great multitude will be saved through them during the tribulation period. Do not wait until then, dear friend, to get saved because you will not have the opportunity if you have heard the gospel of the grace of God at this time, you need to be saved tonight. But be that as it may, during that time, a great multitude is going to turn to the Lord through these preachers of the gospel (Rev. 7 : 9-10).

The Lord Jesus took the disciples as far as Bethany, He lifted up His hands and blessed them. What did they see when they saw His hands? They saw the prints of the nails in His hands, and as He blessed them He was carried up out of their sight into glory. The Lord Jesus Christ has been received right back into glory at God's right hand and is there crowned with glory and honour and majesty. There are many things involved with that, firstly "Having ascended up on high, he has led captivity captive" (Eph.4:8). We were in captivity to Satan but He has freed us and in so doing He "gave gifts unto men". These gifts are not given to the 'body of Christ', Scripture never says that, it says they are given to the church, they are given to men. They are for the edification of the body of Christ, but the gifts are in relation to the house of God because in the house of God there is responsibility (2 Tim.2), and if I have a gift that God has given me I have a responsibility to minister that gift. In the body of Christ there is privilege and care and affection, "if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; and if one member be glorified, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor.12:26), but in the house of God there is responsibility. What we are talking about tonight, the mystery of godliness, is in relation to the house of God, not the body of Christ. Is it not the same? Well, both are the church of the living God, but they are different aspects of it. We need to "rightly [divide] the word of truth" (2 Tim.2:15).

The Lord Jesus has been received up in the glory and His administration is from up there. Would to God that we would take more advantage of His present ministry because He lives in the power of an endless life in the glory, never more to die, there He administers peace, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rm.5:1), He is the Head of a new creation (Eph.1:10), we can know Him as Head (Eph.4:15), He is our "great high priest" (Heb.4:14, 10:21) for our difficulties and trials, He is "the Minister of the Sanctuary" (Heb.8:1-2) to take us into God's presence to worship the living God (Heb.10:19-20). He still washes the feet of the saints now that He is risen, He still refreshes His own, He is "the Shepherd". If somebody is connected with something they should not be as the Shepherd He leads them out of that, He is the "Bishop of our souls" (both 1 Pet.2:25), He oversees His flock. The brethren fail, and fail miserably (and there is no excuse), but there is One who will never fail, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Great is the mystery of godliness" and it is all concerned with the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we be more occupied with that Man in the glory. May God add a blessing to His word for His name's sake.