

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- Sunday 3rd November 2024 am

TITLE: "The Hidden Glory of the Church" TEXT: 1 Timothy 3 v 14-16

SERIES: "Guarding the deposit" Pt 10 Scripture references from the ESV

1 Timothy 3:14-16 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. ¹⁶ Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

*He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.*

When we come to understand what the church is and how precious it is to the Lord Jesus Christ, then we will love not just our church, but THE church. THE church is made up of all believers; it is the body of Christ; it exists globally; it finds its expression in smaller gatherings called the local church. When we come to love it rightly, we will not have a critical spirit, but instead we will see THE church as

God's people, loved by Christ and therefore precious to us

In our individualistic society, we have largely lost sight of the character of the church, its glory and the love that Christ has for his people. Instead, church has become something that is there to meet our needs. When that does not happen, or it does not fit with our expectations, we find fault with it and with those who lead it. We look for another church that ticks all our boxes. That is the wrong view of church.

We need to see how Christ defines the church

- Then we will begin to see that this glorious body of Christ to which we belong requires us to behave in a radically glorious way
- Then we will begin to see that the one who makes the church glorious, the Lord Jesus Christ, needs to be put on display in the church's conduct and confession for the world to see and admire.

In the verses above, Paul reveals his purpose in writing this letter to Timothy. He hopes to visit Timothy so he can strengthen Timothy in his task and tell him how to fulfil his

ministry and how to lead the church. However, he knows that this might not happen and hence this letter (vv14-15). Paul writes it because we need to know how to behave as the church. We can only see how to behave when we see who the church is because

Our behaviour is rooted in who we are.

1. We need to see the church's character. Paul describes the church in three ways (v15)

- The church is the household of God. It is not an activity that we do or a club we belong to.

The church is God's family and it is a family to which we are related.

God is our heavenly Father, who, by his Spirit, has given new birth to us so that we are truly his children. The Father's eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is our elder brother who shares his inheritance with us even though we do not deserve it. All true believers are our brothers and sisters.

This divine family that we belong to as believers is a family that is in an eternal relationship.

When Jesus returns to renew the heavens and earth, we will dwell together as God's redeemed and perfected family

However, we don't need to wait until then to enjoy unity. An illustration used by A W Tozer helps us to see this:

Has it ever occurred to you that 100 pianos all tuned to the same [tuning] fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So 100 worshippers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become 'unity conscious' and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.

When we strive for unity and make that our god, we will be less united. We are God's family and it is only as we look to Christ that we will find our hearts truly united.

- The church is the church of the living God. It is not my church or your church, as if you own it.

It is God's church

Through Christ, the living God died to save us so that we could become part of his church. Through his Spirit, the living God gives us life and makes his presence known.

The living God makes his presence known when the church gathers.

You can be aware of God's presence on your own, but there is a special and unique sense of God's presence when his people gather together. Martin Luther said: *At home, in my own house there is no warmth or vigour in me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through.*

This has happened here at the Tuesday prayer meetings. God makes his presence felt in a way that does not happen when you pray on your own. The livestreaming of our services, whilst valuable for those who cannot get to church, is no substitute for the physical gathering of God's people.

- The church is the pillar and buttress of the truth. It is the dwelling place, not of lifeless idols or false gods, but of the living God.

It is the pillar and buttress that holds up the truth of Christ for all to see

Christ is the crowning glory of the church

He is the glory that the church holds up and that the church reflects.

Now do you see how glorious the church is and how precious it is to belong to it? Do you see why we can love it and why gathering with the church is so important and such a great blessing?

- We are God's family in eternal relationship with the triune God, Father, Son and Spirit, and with one another.
- We are a people belonging to God, made alive by the only living God who gives new life to us
- We are a people among whom God dwells, especially when we gather together to worship him.
- We are the people whom God has strengthened by his Spirit to hold up the truth of Christ for the watching world to see and admire

**We are a people who are built on the truth of Christ
and entrusted with guarding the truth of Christ for future generations.**

2. We need to know what the church's conduct is to be. The theme that runs through this letter is that of godliness. In Chapter 2, Paul tells us that we are to pray for governments so that we might live godly lives. He goes on to command men to lift up holy hands in prayer, and women to dress appropriately for those who profess godliness. Then (Ch 3) he expects the church to be led by godly men called elders, supported by equally godly deacons. Looking ahead to **Ch 6: 11**, he tells Timothy to **pursue godliness**.

How we conduct ourselves as God's family matters. God is holy and as those who belong to his family, we are to bear the family likeness.

We are to be holy as he is holy

- We are to use our tongue rightly, not to tear down but to build up God's family, to praise God and to pray for others.
- We are to sit loose to money and possessions, instead using the things God gives us to serve others and further God's kingdom
- We are to avoid sexual immorality and instead use God's good gift of sex within heterosexual marriage
- We are to be faithful to our promises
- We are not to abuse alcohol or any other mind-altering substances

**If we are going to be the people who claim to be God's family and claim to be made alive to Christ by the Spirit,
then we need to be godly people.**

We need to look like the God we claim is changing us to be like himself, becoming increasingly like our elder brother, the Lord Jesus Christ. This matters because the world is watching us, and so the beauty and attractiveness of Christ need to be seen in the church that bears his name if those outside the church are going to be attracted to Christ.

If we say Christ is in us, Christ needs to be seen

3. We need to make the church's confession (v16). Just living out the gospel is not enough. We might be very nice people because Christ is at work in us, but we also need to tell people about Jesus. Paul speaks about **the mystery of godliness**, using 'mystery' to mean a divine secret that was once hidden but has now been

made known. To what is he pointing to reveal the secret of living a godly life and behaving rightly within the church?

Paul speaks of the greatness of the mystery of godliness, but starts with the word **HE**. The mystery is revealed to us in a person and that person is the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything we need to know and believe about God and what godliness looks like is revealed in the person of Christ.

It is Christ who needs to be confessed

We hold up the truth of Christ as we confess him to the world and conduct ourselves in a Christlike way. Ahead of the next sermon (based on v16), we take a brief look at the Christ we confess. Consider the first three lines of **v16** covering:

- Christ's incarnation and death for our justification
- Christ's resurrection as vindication of his person and work
- Christ's ascension to heaven to the praise of God's holy angels

Then the next three lines speak of:

- Christ being proclaimed by the apostles (and that is continued to this day by our confession of Christ)
- Christ being believed on for justification
- Christ being glorified, not just in his ascension to heaven, but also in his return to earth

In these six statements, there is enough spiritual food to feed our souls for eternity.

- Take time to prayerfully chew each one of them over in your mind and you will find your soul delighting in Christ

Consider the phrase **He was seen by angels**. When did this happen?

Christ was seen by angels from the very moment God spoke them into existence. The first thing they beheld was the beauty of the eternal Son of God, and their response was praise. Then when he clothed himself in our human flesh, the angels came to view the incarnate Christ child, and joyfully obeyed the command to go and sing his praises to the shepherds, declaring that our Saviour had been born. On the darkest day, when Jesus was nailed to the cross, the angels saw him, and waited for a command to take him down from the cross. That command never came. Instead, as he took

his last breath, they heard him cry **'It is finished'**. With that work of Christ, the price of our sin had been paid in full.

The angels saw him being buried, and the three days later they saw him being raised to life and gladly went to the grave to declare to his disciples: **'He is not here, he has risen as he said.'** Forty days later, as they watched him ascend from this earth to heaven, they cheered with thunderous praise as the champion of heaven returned to its throne room and took his seat on the throne to rule over everything.

**Jesus has now been exalted to the highest throne in the universe
to reign forever as King of kings and Lord of lords**

The angels will be watching when he returns, as they announce his coming with a fanfare of trumpets.

- This one verse (**v16**) contains six statements for us to meditate on, one for each day of the week. As we do so, we will go deeper with Christ and he will be more precious to us. Our joy in him will increase and he will be glorified by our delight in him.

When Paul speaks of Christ as the mystery of godliness, revealing all I need to believe about God and my personal godliness, he shows us something more. It is through confessing Christ in this way that

we become the godly people this letter calls us to be.

Christ is the key to godliness.

It is only because of Christ that we can conduct ourselves in a right way in God's family. Without Christ, there would be no church, and no adoption into God's family. We would have no righteousness to commend us to God and our sin would condemn us to an eternal hell under God's wrath.

The New Birth is only possible because of Christ. The Spirit was operative in the world before Christ came, but it was only because he came, lived, died, rose and ascended that we have the Spirit in us.

Without Christ and his work to redeem us from sin, Satan and death, there would be no conformity to Christ. We need to go deeper with Christ. Our lives are transformed to become like him as we spend time in fellowship with Christ, meditating on his greatness, talking to him about the things he shows us, sharing what is in our heart and praising him with his people.

A life of devotion to Christ, and fellowship with him, are the secret to a godly life

Like the pianos all tuned to one tuning fork, as we are all tuned to Christ so we will truly be able to display the beauty of God's family, experience God's life and presence and hold up the glory of Christ for the world to admire.

As Christ is formed in us, so the hidden glory of the church will be seen.