



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1st Timothy 3:14-16

“The Secret of Godliness, The Truth We Defend”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our Scripture reading for this morning is a brief passage but a very significant passage in the 3rd chapter of 1st Timothy. So will you turn with me to 1 Timothy chapter 3, and we want to read verses 14 through 16.

Many of you will remember the 3rd chapter of 1 Timothy as a chapter in which the apostle, in writing to young Timothy, sets forth the qualifications for the office of elder or bishop for the terms are synonymous in the Bible: one looking at the maturity and dignity of the office, a term elder, the other at the function oversight. And then also Paul gives us the qualifications of the office of deacon. And after he concludes this in verse 13, he writes in verse 14, the first of the three verses I want to read for the Scripture reading,

“These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy, (the Greek text says ‘confessedly’, literally) 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 in, (not into, as the common version has it,) received up in glory.”

If you have been looking at a modern version of the New Testament, you probably have noticed that my text reads, “God was manifest in the flesh,” but yours has something like, “He was manifest in the flesh,” or, perhaps even, “He who was manifest in the flesh.” That is because a number of our ancient manuscripts have the relative pronoun “who”, literally or “he who”, we might render it. Whereas another number of ancient manuscripts have the reading “God” and the critics at this point are, as a basis for some of our versions, have taken one reading whereas some have taken the other reading.

I will say a little about it in the message. I personally feel that there is still good reason for accepting the reading, “God was manifest in the flesh.” But as I’m going to try to point out in the message, even if we should read the other, “He was manifest in the flesh,” it can be no other than Jesus Christ who is referred to. And furthermore, if the Jesus Christ referred to were only a man this would not really make sense.

So the sense demands the idea of a God-man and many of the ancient manuscripts do have that reading. May God bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we come unto Thee in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who was manifested in the flesh. And through whom we have come to know who God is and what he is like. No man hath ever seen God, the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

“He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father,” Jesus said. And Lord, we realize that as we look at him we have a true picture of what Thou art like. As we see the attributes of Jesus in his divine nature we see the attributes of God. And as we see the

attributes of Jesus Christ in his human nature, we see the attributes of a humanity created by God, yet untouched by sin. And so coming to Thee through the great God-man, we worship Thee today. We worship Thee at this moment. We give Thee the praise and thanks giving of redeemed hearts. And we pray that through the ministry of the Scriptures in this hour we may be built up in our faith.

We pray for our country's leader. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon him and upon all who are in authority. Enable us to grasp the significance of the apostolic teaching concerning subjection to the authorities that be. And enable us as Christians to glorify Thy name in our relationship to them. We pray for the President's cabinet, for the directors of the various departments of the national government. For our local government, our state and our city and our county governments; we pray, Oh God, Thy blessing upon them, for Thou hast exhorted us to pray for those in authority.

We remember the preachers of the gospel wherever they proclaim Thy word today and pray that through that preaching the whole church of Jesus Christ, the group of true believers in him may be strengthened and built up. And enable us, Lord, to accomplish the purposes that Thou has for us. We thank Thee for the bright prospects of the future and amid much that is outwardly pessimistic or tends to pessimism. We thank Thee, Lord, that as believers in Jesus Christ everything is ultimately optimistic. And so we worship Thee and we praise Thee.

We know, Lord, that many of our brethren and our sisters are in trials and troubles, disturbed and perplexed, and we pray that Thou wilt administer to them and may, through the very experiences of our lives, we come to know Thee in a deeper way. We rejoice that we have a God who is omnipotent and is able to do all that our petitions request. We thank Thee for the “no's” we receive, for we know that Thou art so wise and so knowledgeable that Thou art able to give us in answer just the things that are best for us. And so we rejoice in a God who is all powerful and who has all wisdom. And who, through Jesus Christ, offers himself to all who know that they are sinners.

Now, may Thy blessing rest upon the remainder of this service, the singing of the hymn, the preaching of the word. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Now today, I want to speak to you briefly on the subject “The Secret of Godliness, The Truth We Defend,” from the verses that I read in the Scripture reading, 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 14 through verse 16. And so will you turn again to 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 14 through verse 16?

If you had wandered in the little village of Ephesus during the 1st Century, in the middle of that 1st Century down one of the streets of the city on, say, a Saturday night or perhaps a Sunday night, for it is likely that the early church did meet on Sunday night rather than Saturday night as we saw when we studied through the Book of the Acts, or possibly, less likely, on Sunday morning, as you looked about the great city of Ephesus -- I said village, it really was a village by our standards, but nevertheless in its day it was a fine city -- it was a city that was known for its large amphitheater which rested on the top of the highest hill of the little city. And then on the other side of the city it was known all over the ancient world for the beautiful temple of Diana of the Ephesians.

And if you were wandering down the streets of Ephesus as a tourist, looking at the things that you were seeing, and had moved from the richer part of the area to an humbler part of the city you may have come across an invisible temple and you would have known that invisible temple by the fact that as you wandered down the streets you heard some singing coming from one of the little houses. And in that little house, if you had investigated, you may have found a group of simple, ordinary people with a few who were of more noble background, meeting in a very simple way. Gathering around some simple elements of bread and wine with, perhaps, portions of the Old Testament Scriptures. You would have noticed that in their meetings they were largely prompted by the Holy Spirit in their meetings. There was no one person who was serving as the leader of the group, but they were guided by elders and by deacons.

And if you had listened to what they were singing you might well have heard them singing, “God was manifest in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” The reason that you may well have heard that is that it is the belief of many New Testament scholars that 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 16, beginning with the word, “God was manifest in the flesh,” was part of an ancient hymn. A Christian hymn perhaps part of an ancient creed. The reason for this is that these statements of verse 16 have a rhythmical structure which you probably can even grasp from the English text.

In addition, the verse begins without controversy, and that word may be rendered, literally, confessedly so that what follows may be a confession which they were giving. And in addition, there is a very irregular word, the one that I referred to in verse 16 the word “who”, if that was the thing that they were singing. “Who was manifest in the flesh.” “He who was manifest in the flesh.” It appears to some that this was taken out of a work in which it would have made perfect sense, but put in the text as it is here New Testament scholars have suggested that it was an incorporation into the letter that the author wrote to Timothy of a part of a common hymn which they often sang, which expressed truth.

Interestingly enough, Pliny the Younger, who was the governor of Bithynia, a province on the Black Sea, not too far from the city of Ephesus, wrote to the Emperor Trajan asking how he should proceed against the Christians. He had already said that he believed their beliefs to be, quote, “An odious superstition,” unquote, and their beliefs had been outlawed. And when he describes what he saw or had heard took place in Christian gatherings he said that they met together on the morning of a fixed day. Evidently, he refers to Sunday, and they took vows not to rob or steel or lie or commit adultery. And that they sang, quote, “A hymn of praise to Christ as God,” unquote. And so this is very early evidence of the character of the early meetings of the New Testament Christians, they met in this simple way and they sang hymns of praise to Jesus Christ as God.

If that is true and if the author of this epistle, the Apostle Paul has selected a phrase or two from a hymn, it may well be that. I am not entirely persuaded of that, myself. I mention that merely because if you read New Testament books and books on the background of the New Testament and introductions to the specific pastoral epistles you probably will see reference to this theory. I am inclined to think that the Apostle Paul is a man who more often than not -- that is perhaps putting it too strong -- the Apostle Paul is a man who often rises from the ordinary to the sublime. And if you read his letters you will notice more than one place where the apostle seems to be proceeding along rather simply and unobtrusively in his letters, but by the Holy Spirit's direction he suddenly seems to rise out of himself and speaks in a very sublime way of spiritual truth. One only has to think of a great chapter like 1 Corinthians 13, the chapter on love in which the apostle has been, it seems to me at least, given an extra ability to express in beautiful language the truth of God. It's a magnificent thing. I am inclined to think that that is what happened here. That the apostle does not really borrow from a hymn, does not really borrow from an ancient creed, but is, by the Holy Spirit, enabled to write this magnificent testimony to the truth that he thought churches should defend. That happens to be my opinion. I feel that the text should read, “God was manifest in the flesh and I will say more about that in just a moment.

As you look at 1 Timothy chapter 3 you notice, of course, that the apostle has been speaking about ordinary things such as church order and discipline about elders and deacons. And he is explaining that he wishes to visit - wishes Timothy to know how to behave in that church. Now, he is talking about the local church, he's talking about just such a gathering as this because he has just given us the qualifications for an elder and for a deacon. And since the universal church, the invisible church, of all believers does not have offices, it has one great pastor, our Lord Jesus Christ who is the great shepherd or pastor of the sheep, local churches have offices. This is, undoubtedly, a section that

refers to the local church. And he describes this church as the pillar and ground of the truth.

Now notice he does not say pillow as if it were a soft place to rest your head in sleep. But pillar, that is that which holds up the roof, the pillar and the foundation of the truth. Now, one might say, “Why does Paul call the local church the pillar and ground of the truth?” For, you see, the local church is the product of the truth. We who meet here if we are believers in Jesus Christ we meet here because we are the products of the truth. That is, the truth has ministered to us, we have responded to the truth, we have believed in Jesus Christ. And consequently we are Christians because of the truth. The church is a group of believers that meet together because of the truth. The truth is responsible for us. The truth is the foundation of this meeting. How can it be said that we are the foundation of the truth? How can it be said that we hold up the roof of the truth?

Well I think if I understand Paul, and I don't think I completely understand him, it's on my list of things to ask Paul when I get to heaven what he precisely meant here. I want to know if I'm right, I hope I'm able to say, “I told you so,” to some of my friends [Laughter]. But anyway, I think that what he means is that the church is the pillar and the ground of the truth in the sense that it is a bulwark in the disciplinary protection of the truth. That is, it is the responsibility of the truth of the church to guard the truth. It is the responsibility of the church to observe and to detect and to warn saints against heresy. And so in that sense the truth which has brought us into being has been committed into our hands for protection.

And consequently we have elders in the local church whose duty it is to discipline in case there is a straying from the truth. And the preachers of the word of God are called upon to proclaim the word in the truth and also to point out erroneous teaching. For Satan is always anxious to penetrate the assemblies of the saints and to mislead them, lead them astray by false doctrine. So I think that is what Paul means here.

You will notice that this double design of the church includes the church described as the house of the living God. Not only are we the preserver of the truth but we are the house of the living God. Now everyone knows that a household is a place where people who are related to one another live. Where they move. Where they fellowship with one another. Where they have relationships with one another. Where they support one another ideally. Where they enjoy one another. Now that is what the local church should be. It is not a place in which we meet on Sunday morning to hear a lecture from some preacher of the world. It is a group of people who form a household of God in whom he dwells personally and we are - if we are believers related to him and related to one another and there should be not only the fellowship and the warmth of a family gathering but there should be the fellowship and the warmth of a family gathering in which our Father is God in heaven.

In other words it is true to say that our relationships to one another, if we are Christians, are deeper than our relationships to our own families by blood only. Now that is a remarkable thing. The church is the house of the living God. Now he says, “The living God,” because Ephesus was known as the place where there existed the great temple of the Goddess Diana who was dead. And so the church is the house of the living God, not the house or the temple of a dead god. The pillar and ground of the truth.

I think it's striking, too, that God has committed the truth to us. Isn't that amazing when you think about it? The protection of this truth has been committed to us. It has not been committed simply to a book. It has not been committed to a creed. I am not against creeds, I sympathize with all kinds of creeds that express the truth, so far as they express the truth. I see nothing wrong with a person saying, “My creed is this.” We don't have a creed in Believers Chapel. If you were to ask Mr. Prier now, “What do you believe in Believers Chapel?” He loves to take the Bible and hand it to you and say, “This is what we believe.” Well, that's our creed. We may not even have a written creed but that, then, becomes our creed. Of course we have a creed, we always have a creed. But it's striking

that God has committed this truth to believing persons. So not to books, not to creeds, but to living persons which means, of course, that if we are to protect this truth we must have a vital first hand relationship to that truth. We shall not protect the truth if we do not know it. We shall not ever be a good preserver and bulwark of God's word if it is not a living reality in our hearts and lives.

Well now, that's my introduction. One might say, “Well Dr. Johnson, why do we need any protection? Why do we need any bulwark for the truth?” Well, in Timothy in these epistles, Timothy and Titus, the pastoral epistles, Paul warns against the heretics and words like these, for example, in one place he refers to those who are, “Destitute of the truth.” In another place he refers to them as, “Those who have shot wide of the truth.” He refers to others as, “Those who have defied the truth,” as, “Those who have closed their ears to the truth,” and as, “Those who have turned their backs upon the truth.” Well, that's why it's necessary that the truth have as its preserver the church of the living God.

Now let's look at Paul's Hexipla of Mystery, as someone has said, these six statements that make up the mystery of godliness. Now, after all, you cannot have a sermon with six points. You are taught in homiletics that you may have three, that is good to have three. And it's possible on occasions to have four and on some occasions you may have seven, but never six because six is the number of man. And you must not have six points. So in deference to some of my teachers I must have an introductory point.

Notice the opening of verse 16, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.” Isn't it striking that the Bible often says things that are ironic in the light of history? “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.” Now if there is one thing that has been at controversy down through the years it is the essence of the truth of this confessional statement, if we may call it that, by Paul. For, you see, one of the sources of the great controversy of the ages is, who was Jesus Christ? And the apostle says, “Unconfessedly, great is the mystery of godliness.” But now, after nineteen centuries

I wonder if Paul would write “unconfessedly”. I think he would but I think he would also smile when he wrote it. I think he would say, “There have been many controversies down through the years but they ought not to have been.” We should agree that the mystery of godliness is great and these facts are true.

Now he calls it a mystery because it is a secret hid from eternity in time but now reveal to believers, “Great is the mystery of godliness.” Now to explain the truth, and so we go on to point number two, but line one of our hymn, “God was manifest in the flesh.” You could never say this of a mere man. You could not say of Moses, great as he was, “God was manifest in the flesh.” You could not say Socrates, great as he was, “He was God manifest in flesh.” You could not even say of Paul the apostle, perhaps the greatest of men who have followed the Lord Jesus Christ. You could not say of him, “God was manifest in the flesh.” You could say, “I saw God in Paul.” That is something that everyone should be able to say today of every Christian, “I saw or see God in them.” But you could not say of Paul, “God manifest in the flesh.” You could not even say of John Calvin, “God manifest in the flesh.” Hurt me to say that [Laughter], but you could not say it.

You could not say of any other figure of history, “God manifest in flesh.” You could not even say it of John F. Kennedy, “God manifest in the flesh,” though I seem to sense that some would like to have said that. You could not say it. And this is, therefore, one of the greatest of the statements of praise of our Lord Jesus in the Bible, “God manifest in the flesh.” And let me tell you, it is of the greatest significance for all true Christianity depends ultimately upon this fact: if Jesus Christ were not God in the flesh, we have no certain word from God. Now, of course, you might say, “Well what about all of the Scriptures of the Old Testament?” Well yes, the prophets did write about God, they had experiences of God but they were men.

What about Moses? Yes he wrote of God, he had great experiences of God, but Moses was a man. And ultimately it is difficult to believe to the fullest a man. But finally

in time God himself came and the words of Jesus Christ are the words of God and the actions of Jesus Christ are the actions of God. And so in the final analysis that is why God must come to settle the question of the truth. And so God was manifest in the flesh, in the person of our Lord.

Now, a great deal of controversy has arisen over how we should translate that. As I said, some want to translate it, “He who was manifest in the flesh,” and there is good manuscript authority for it. I don’t have an hour to talk about this textual problem. We spend sometimes more than an hour at the seminary over this particular problem. It is my conclusion from my study that actually this should read, “God was manifest in the flesh.” But it’s a very debatable point. I certainly would admit that. And it could be that Paul actually wrote, “He who was manifest in the flesh.”

But I would like to go on from that and say that if Paul wrote, “He who was manifest in the flesh,” then ultimately there can be no reference still to any other person than our Lord Jesus Christ. And let me argue that point for just a moment. Let’s suppose that the text really reads, “He who was manifest in the flesh,” or, “He was manifest in the flesh.” Let’s think of the possibilities. Let’s suppose, for example, that it is possible that the text refers to a man. Let’s suppose, secondly, that it does not refer to a man but to an angel. And then, thirdly, let’s suppose that it might refer to an evil angel, and since Satan is the prince of the evil angels let’s say to Satan. And finally, let’s say it may refer to a person who possesses the attributes of God -- God. Let’s say, then, that we should read this, “He who,” but understand it as a man. “He who 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.”

Now, if this refers to a man how can we say, “He was manifest in the flesh,” and call it a great mystery? Since every man is manifest in the flesh. I don’t see how this text could mean anything if we say, “It’s only a man and he was manifest in the flesh,” and

then call that a great mystery, or a great - is the mystery of godliness. It just does not make sense because every man is manifest in the flesh.

Well let's discard that. Let's say it's an angel. And so we read, “He who,” but we understand an angel. “He who was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels.” An angel seen of angels. Now that's no great mystery. What would be the greatness of the mystery of godliness that an angel should be seen by an angel? Now if we knew that all angels were bright, perhaps that would be a mystery -- but we don't know that. The Bible seems to indicate the opposite, so that doesn't make sense.

Well let's say that it's a reference to Satan. “He was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world.” A lot of those things do pertain to Satan today. “Received up into glory.” Now if Satan has been received up into glory, I must confess I am deeply puzzled by the word of God. So I cannot see how we can take this to be anything other than a God and call it great is the mystery of godliness. And since we know from other passages of Scripture that the author of this epistle conceived of Jesus Christ as one who was manifest in the flesh and conceived of him as God it seems to me that even if we were to translate this, “He was manifest in the flesh,” we can mean no other person than he who was God, our Lord Jesus Christ. And so, you see, I read this, “God was manifest in the flesh.” And I do not surrender a single bit of truth if I read it, “He was manifest in the flesh,” for I expounded as a reference to Jesus Christ.

So, God was manifest in the flesh in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we looked at Jesus Christ, we see God. When we noticed the attributes of our Lord, we see the attributes of God. When we see his love, we see the love of God. When we see his justice, we see the justice of God. When we see his judgment, we see the judgment of God. Just as he loves, we feel that God loves us, so when we see him take out his cord and drive out the money changers from the temple we know that our Lord also judges. God was manifest in the flesh, and truly God.

The New England dreamer and seer, Brunson, off on a visit to England had a conversation with Carlyle in which he said that he could sincerely say, “Just as much as Jesus that he was one with the Father.” “Yes,” replied Carlyle, “but Jesus got men to believe him.” [Laughter]

Now the fact that the text says, “He was manifest in the flesh,” means, of course, that there is implied in this the preexistence of Jesus. He existed and he was manifest in the flesh at a point in time. And so he who possessed a divine nature and was the eternal person, the second person of the trinity, at a point in time took to himself an additional nature and we saw God manifested in the flesh. Now that is evident from the teaching of the Bible throughout.

We read in the Old Testament in Micah chapter 5, in verse 2, “And thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” And so the person who is from, “Old, from everlasting,” at a point in time came from Bethlehem unto God, the divine human person, Jesus of Nazareth. Manifest in the flesh, not an angel, but in the flesh. In the same kind of flesh that we have apart from sin. And you know that has tremendous fullness of comfort and consolation. Our Lord has appeared in human flesh and God has come to be with men. And when I believe in him and am incorporated into him I am with God. Tremendous. God manifest in the flesh.

Not simply appeared to be in the flesh as the early Docetists thought. As if God in the person of the Son came down and took on something that looked like flesh. No, it was real flesh. For the soldiers took their spears and pierced his side and forthwith came out blood and water. Well that’s line one of the hymn.

Line two, “vindicated in his spirit, justified in the spirit.” He is no convicted imposter. You might have thought that, for when Jesus is hanging upon the tree they were saying of him, “He has blasphemed God.” Others were saying, “He is a political

insurrectionist.” Still others were saying he was a poor fellow who never did wrong to anybody but who has been mistreated by the Romans and the Jews. On the third day he arose again from the dead and he was vindicated as the Son of God in power by the resurrection from the dead. “Vindicated in his spirit.” I translate that with a little S, not a large S. As you know in the Greek text the word spirit was written without any reference to capital letters and consequently it is exegesis that determines whether we should translate with a capital S or a little S. And since the parallel with flesh has preceded and a reference to our Lord’s human nature, here this is also a reference to his humanity, his human spirit. And so he was vindicated in his holy, obedient, human spirit on the resurrection and God said to men everywhere when he raised Jesus from the dead, “what he said, I stand behind. What he did, I stand behind. And he is alive to carry out the conditions of the covenant in heaven.”

Line three, fourth point, “Seen of angels.” Jesus Christ worked for men but he worked in the presence of angels. They foretold his birth, they sang over his birth, they strengthened him in his temptation, they consoled him in Gethsemane, they sat by the empty tomb, they proclaimed his resurrection, they comforted the disciples at his ascension, and they preached the Second Advent. For they said, “This same Jesus whom you see going up into heaven shall come again in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” And so he was seen of angels. His work was done for their instruction, too. Isn’t it striking that in the Bible it speaks of the things that were done here by our Lord as not only being for our benefit, but for the instruction of angels. I think that’s one of the most striking things that the Bible says.

The apostles refer to themselves as, “A spectacle to the angels.” “A theater.” It’s as if we are living down here on a platform and out in the congregation. All about us are holy angels looking down upon us to see what they can learn from us. Don’t think they’re learning very much from a lot of us. And Paul says, remember in Ephesians chapter 3, that it is through this great purpose and plan of God through Jesus Christ that

the angels are taught the manifold wisdom of God and they are taught it by the church, he says. Think of that. The church teaching angels things.

Now it's great news to know that when I preach there are angels in the congregation. Not you, I mean, young ladies, but invisible angels. And they are listening and they are learning. I hope they like my theology. You remember that when Peter speaks about the plan of salvation, when he concludes he says, “Which things the angels desire to look into.” And so all of this great truth that is being revealed and in which we are participating, angels have never really participated because, you see, they do not know what it means to be redeemed. They do not know the experience that we know of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. And so we are teaching and they are learning things from us. “Seen of angels.”

The angels ministering to our Lord, learning from him, still learning from him, still learning from those who are united with him. There is a hymn which has a stanza, “Angels in fixed amazement around our altars hover, with eager gaze adore the grace of our eternal lover.”

Line four, I must hasten, twelve o'clock is fast approaching. Notice, “Preached unto the gentiles.” Now notice, it is a person who is proclaimed, not a program. We must never think of the church's work as the carrying out of a program. We are engaged in the proclamation of a person, ultimately. I am not against programs providing they all tend to the personal end or aim.

Why is this a mystery? Why is it a mystery to say, “Preached unto the gentiles?” Why, for the simple reason that until Jesus Christ came there was no real preaching to the gentiles in the sense that there is now. Gentiles became Jews in order to participate in the revelation God had committed to them. But now in this age he is preached unto the gentiles. By the way: preached, not portrayed. I do not want to take off against liturgy but it so happens that in the New Testament the great stress rests upon preaching our Lord, not portraying him in the liturgy.

There is a sense in which we do, we meet around the Lord's table. In this church we meet every Sunday night around the Lord's table. And Paul tells us that when we take the bread and wine we proclaim the Lord's death till he comes. And when we are baptized in water after we have been converted we do proclaim truth then. But aside from those ordinances the New Testament says that the great stress of the spread of the word is upon the preaching of the word. He does not say that he was drawn among the gentiles as if art is the way that we are to proclaim him. Now I believe it is possible to proclaim our Lord in art and in the arts. But the great stress of the New Testament rests upon the preaching of the word. We must never be so occupied with other ways of proclaiming our Lord that we forget the way that the apostles have exhorted us to follow the preaching of the word.

He does not say that he was acted among the gentiles. As if we are to portray our Lord by drama. Now it is certainly, I'm sure, the thrust of the New Testament for us to say that it is not in Pygmalion, for example, that we are to find the truth, but in Paul. It is not George Bernard Shaw we are to find truth, though there may be some truth in his writings. He was not even a Christian man. Denied the Christian faith. What we are told in the New Testament is the great stress of it is the preaching of the word. So he was preached among the gentiles. I hope as long as I live I shall hear and see preaching of the gospel of our Lord.

Line five, “Believed on in the world.” The reception in the world. In the light of man's nature this is very remarkable, for the gospel story is strange, it is contrary to all prejudices of the flesh, it insults our self-esteem, it tells us we must be born again. I am amazed that anyone ever turned to Jesus Christ. And when I learn what the Bible has to say about human nature, well I am ever more amazed until I read about the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation and that is why we read here, “Believed on in the world.”

By the way, not, “Believed on by the world.” It is hopeless for us to attempt to convert the world, for the word of God has already stated that it shall not come to pass.

Our task is to preach the word and to allow the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of those that he wishes to work in and to bring those that are his to himself. And our task is to preach this gospel far and wide, but if we think that we shall convert the world we are going plainly contrary to the statements of Scripture. And we shall be greatly disappointed and perhaps misleading as well.

Sixth line, he says, “Received up into glory.” Now this does not point to the ascension of our Lord, simply. If it referred simply to the ascension we would have some opening statements that referred to the incarnation and some statements that referred to the age that followed. And then in the last statement we would go back again to the work of our Lord. Notice really in the Greek text reads, “Received up in glory,” and what it really means, if you have a Greek testament with you -more and more people in Believers Chapel are carrying their Greek testaments to the morning service for which I am delighted. We’ve had now, I think, about four classes in Greek and I am just delighted that we are interested in the word sufficiently to read in the Greek text. What Paul is really saying is the equivalent of saying that he was received up into glory and is in glory, for the preposition is the little preposition “in”, not “into” in this case. It is the equivalent of *eis doxon qui esten ean doxa*. Now I hope you got that [Laughter].

“Received up into glory and is in glory.” So it is a reference to our Lord’s session throughout this age and it is the climax of what is stated here. He is our great covenant head and he is still - he has finished his work but he is still with us through his continuing ministry in heaven.

Over a hundred years ago in a room in which there was a dark figure stretched out there was a man by the name of Edwin Stanton. He was present in that room and on the bed stretched out was the gaunt figure of a person who obviously was very ill. It was 7:22 on the morning of April the 15th, 1865. And as Mr. Stanton looked at the body he saw it breathe its last and with that he went over and pulled down the blinds to keep the sunlight out of the room, and then he turned and looked down at the silent form, the

body of Abraham Lincoln, and he said, “Now he belongs to the ages.” A Lincoln biographer, or student, has said that, “That is the shortest biography of Lincoln ever penned and one of the best.”

With all due respect to Abraham Lincoln, there is only one who belongs to the ages. There is only one human being who belongs to the ages in the fullest sense and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. And actually, the ages belong to him. He has come, he has finished his work, he has ascended to the right hand of the Father, there he lingers. He is in glory and he shall come to consummate his purposes at his second advent. “Received up in glory.”

Well let me conclude with just two observations quickly. This is the truth that we are called upon to defend. The truth that Paul is referred to, “God manifest in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.” And in this we also have the duty of those who hear the message. It is to believe. Have you believed? Have you put your trust in this one who was manifest in the flesh? Who was vindicated in his spirit, having accomplished the work of redemption, who is now at the right hand of the Father on high, ministering the great salvation that he has accomplished. It’s simple to become a Christian.

I was thrilled this morning after the service. At 8:30 I was standing at the door, a little boy came up to me about like this with a big smile on his face, he’s about twelve, I guess. He said, “Dr. Johnson I have some news for you.” I said, “What’s your news?” He said, “I’ve accepted Christ as my personal savior.” I said, “When did you do it?” “Last week right after Sunday School,” he said. I said, “Did you tell your Sunday School teacher?” “Yes, I told her.” Well, that’s the kind of decision that it takes to become a Christian and so if you recognize that Christ has died for sin and you recognize that you are a sinner and you accept in grace the free gift of life, believing in him, you become a member of the family of God. May God help you to make that decision. Shall we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the mystery of godliness, the secret of our religion. Religion not in the sense of a body of truth only, but a relationship to a person. And we thank Thee for the saving work of Jesus Christ and, oh Father, if there is one person in this auditorium who has not yet responded, give no rest nor peace until they do.