



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Tim. 3:14-16

"Miscellaneous Topics #30: The Mystery of Godliness"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're turning for the Scripture reading to 1 Timothy chapter 3, and reading verse 14 through verse 16, 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 14 through verse 16. The subject for this morning is "The Mystery of Godliness" and this is the text on which the message is based. You remember that in 1 Timothy chapter 3 the apostle has been giving some instructions concerning elders of bishops, the terms are synonymous and then deacons. And then in verse 14 having done that and having given us other information concerning the local church in the two proceeding chapters, he writes in the 14th verse of 1 Timothy chapter 3,

"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 great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh,

(Now some of you may have a Bible and the translation is being based upon other manuscript testimony and have may have instead of "God was manifest in the flesh," "He was manifest in the flesh" or simply "he who was manifest in the flesh" or even "who was manifest in the flesh." The reason for that difference in reading is that in the Greek

manuscripts of 1 Timothy 3:16 some of the ancient manuscripts have "God was manifest in the flesh" and a great number have "He who was manifest in the flesh rather than the term "God." The difference is very small since the names for God were generally abbreviated in New Testament manuscripts. Instead of being a four letter word in the Greek text it would be simply two letters, the theta, that is the T-H, and then the sigma for the end. And usually a line was drawn above the two letters to show it was an abbreviation. The only difference between the word for who, "he who" in the masculine form and *theos*, "then" would be the line above the two letters and a line in the midst of the Greek theta, which you have of course seen in various things, particularly in the names of fraternity and sororities. So the difference is very small, it is very easy to see how a manuscript, a scribe copying a manuscript might see *theos* and write *bos* or see *bos* and write *theos*. Either one is possible as a mistake of the writer. That's the reason why some of the manuscripts read *theos* and why some read *hos*. And I'll say just a little bit more about it in the exposition. But our text in the Authorized Version is based upon manuscripts which had *theos* which means God. And so the rendering is,

"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."

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

[Message] Well, I didn't know that you knew Latin. I won't ask you if you knew what you were singing, but nevertheless you did sound fine. The subject for today is "The Mystery of Godliness" and we're turning to 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16, one of the great Pauline texts on the subject of the person of Christ. One day, many, many hundred of years of years ago, as the sunset fell over the Ephesian plains, over the yellow fields and the hills that were turning amber; on the top of the highest hill you could see the circular seats of the amphitheater. On the other side of the city stood the immense

column of the temple of Diana, one of the great wonders of that part of the world. In the distance the westering sun turned the Aegean into a sea of glass mingled with fire.

Walking along the famous corso of the city of Ephesus, the marble avenue lined with the busts of the emperors and the images of the gods, there were crowds and throngs of people, some of them going to the Temple of Diana, but most of them to the bloody shows of the amphitheater.

If you had been there and had turned aside into the umber part of the city you might have come to another temple, a temple which could not vie in material splendor with the Temple of Dianna, but nevertheless which was really a greater temple, a temple in which the worship of the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was carried on. And in that little temple of people who were gathered in a private home, as you passed along the city streets you might have heard some singing. I'm sure that it had a glow about it too. And you might have heard them singing, "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." For you see, 2 Timothy or 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 is thought by many New Testament scholars to be part of an old hymn or part of an old creed. The reason for that is it is constructed with rhythm. Notice those six clauses, "God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the nations, believed on in the world, received up onto glory."

Furthermore, it begins with the adverb confessedly, translated in the Authorized Version "without controversy" but confessedly. That sounds as if it were a confession made by a group of people. And then also if that reading in the Greek text, which we talked about in the Scripture reading, the relative pronoun "he who" is genuine, then that would increase the likelihood that this was an old hymn or part of a creed, because one could see how it was rather incomplete in itself. "He who was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels." So there was good reason for thinking, many feel,

that what we have here is the remnant of an ancient hymn which the apostle included in the letter that he wrote to Timothy.

Now, there is no certainty about that. It is ultimately speculation, and of course we cannot speak of it as something that is really true. We know that it is true to the thought of the New Testament, and it is also true to the practices of the early church. Pliny the Younger who was governor of Bithynia, a province on the Black Sea, wrote to the Emperor Trajan asking in his letter how he should deal with these Christians whose worship was already outlawed and whose beliefs he stigmatized as an odious superstition. He told the Emperor that the Christians were accustomed to meet together on the morning of a fixed day, evidently on a Sunday morning, and there they took vows not to rob, or steal, or lie, or commit adultery, and that they sang and these are the precise words of Pliny, "a hymn of praise to Christ as God." It's just possible that this very expression here, "God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of the angels" and so on is the hymn that he refers to when he speaks of a hymn of praise to Christ as God. Well, that's pure speculation and we cannot be certain of it all.

One thing we do know is that this is one of the great statements of the New Testament concerning the person of Jesus Christ. It's rather interesting, too, I think, to see how the apostle here as he often does rises from the ordinary to the sublime. Now, nothing could be more ordinary than to speak of the qualifications for being a deacon, or the qualifications for being an elder. And that's what he's been speaking about in the preceding context. He's talking about church order. He's talking about church discipline. And he explains that he wishes Timothy to know how to behave in the church, which he calls the "pillar" that "pillar" not "pillow." Some people do think of the church as a pillow and they come and act accordingly. And they behave, as he says, properly. In other words, they go to sleep. He calls it the pillar and ground of the truth. That is, it's the pillar in the sense that it is that which is to be the defense of the truth. And it's the ground of the truth. It's the bulwark of the truth and disciplinary protection.

Why is the church the bulwark of that upon which it is founded itself? The church exists by virtue of the truth, and yet at the same time Paul calls the church the bulwark upon that which it itself is founded. Probably he refers to the church as the defense of the truth. That is the defense of truth against heresy. So he thinks of the church as that body of people who gather together not only for worship, not only for praise, but they gather together to defend against the heresy, which is always rampant not only outside the church but inside the church itself. In these pastoral epistles of which this text is a part the apostle has a great deal to say about the church, and he has a great deal to say about the heretics. He speaks of the heretics who have lost grip of the truth, in 1 Timothy chapter 6 in verse 5. He speaks of those who have shot wide of the truth in 2 Timothy 2:18. In 2 Timothy chapter 3 in verse 8 he speaks of those who defy the truth. And then in 2 Timothy 4 he speaks of those who have stopped their ears to the truth. And finally in Titus, the third of the Pastoral Epistles, he speaks of those who turn their backs to the truth. Over against such men the church is to join in struggle for the truth of God. It's the pillar and ground of the truth.

There is a double design for the church suggested by this passage. The apostle says that the church is the house of God. Now, when he says the church is the house of God he doesn't mean this building is the house of God. They didn't know the doctrine of a building being the house of God. The early church did not think of a building as a church. We ride down the streets of our cities, and we look off at a building and we say "There is the First Baptist Church." Or "There is the Lovers Lane Methodist Church" or "There is Believers Chapel, a church." But from the standpoint of the New Testament, the church is the people who are gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Believers Chapel is a church, but the building is not a church, biblically. The building is the place where the church meets.

In the earlier days of the United States of America our citizens had a much greater comprehension of the truth of God. And so when you go back to New England now you

will see buildings that are still called the meetinghouse. Well, that's a more proper name for a church, for a church building is really a place where the church meets, a meetinghouse. Now, one thing the Church of Christ has that's very biblical is they will have on their signs outside their buildings frequently "The Church Meets Here" that right. The church is the people. Believers Chapel may congregate in this building on Sunday, but Believers Chapel is scattered all over this countryside during the week. The church is a church of people.

Now, the apostle says that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. It is the house of God. Now, in saying the church is the house of God he means that in this company of people there is a unity between the triune God and the individuals who have believed in Jesus Christ. And we form a house and he is the head of the house, and we are members of the house. The church then, the group of people, is the house of the living God. And also, it is the pillar and ground of the truth, it is the preserver of the truth. The truth is not simply preserved in a book or preserved in a creed. Incidentally, there is nothing wrong with a creed. A creed is the expression of truth. We have an unwritten creed in Believers Chapel. It's what the elders think the New Testament teaches. Now, if we wanted to be forced to say what we believe, we would give you the Bible and say, "This is what we believe. This really is our written creed." But now we have interpretations of that. There is nothing wrong with having a creed. The only thing about creeds that is bad is that people often make creeds and then they refuse to change the creed when new light is given on the creeds. Nothing wrong with writing a creed if you're willing to write another creed to correct the one that you wrote a long time ago, as the Holy Spirit continues to teach. He has not abandoned his teaching ministry. He's still alive and he's still teaching.

Now, we are called the pillar and ground of the truth, because we are the preserver of the truth of God. It is our responsibility not only to proclaim the truth but to defend the truth. Now, if we defend the truth we must point out error. We must put

fingers on heretics, and we must speak plainly with regard to that. Now, there are ways in which that particular office is attacked by the world. They say, "Ah he's negative." Well, the Bible is full of negatives. In order to know the positive will we must also know the negatives. We must not only know what is the truth but what is not the truth. And it is the task of the church not only to proclaim the truth, but it's also the task of the church to defend the truth by pointing out that which is heretical. Now, we do not like that, because in pointing out that which is heretical we may step on the toes of some nice person. But nevertheless God has given us that responsibility of the church. We are the church of the living God. We are the house of the living God. We are also the pillar and ground of the truth. But we are not being faithful to God if we don't point out error as well as the truth.

Well now, what is the truth? Well of course to give you all of the truth we would have to expound all of the Bible. But the apostle is speaking about a particular truth here; evidently, when he says that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth he goes on to speak about the mystery of Godliness. And so we are going to take him to refer here by the term "the truth" to refer to this "hexapla of mystery" as Mr. Spurgeon calls this great text here. The hexapla, the six fold mystery. Now remember, when the Bible uses the term mystery it does not mean mysterious, it means something that simply is a secret, a divine secret, that is only known by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. So the mystery of Godliness is not something mysterious but it is a divine secret which is known only by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. What is this hexapla of mystery, this secret?

Well now, Paul introduces it with a word in the first part of verse 16. He says, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness." Now, there are three important points here, and first is that expression "without controversy." Well, really Paul wrote really before the controversies arose. There were many controversies over the person of Christ over a period of several centuries. But there ought not to be because the Bible is plain and clear. But regardless of the fact that there have been controversies, all

agree that the contents are great, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness." Now I'll say mystery means something that is secret, hid from eternity and time but now revealed to believers. The apostle gives us other mysteries in the New Testament. There is the mystery that concerns the resurrection body. There is the mystery of the relationship of the Jew and Gentile in the church of Jesus Christ. This is the mystery of the incarnation; secrets, not known except by virtue of the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Now he calls it the mystery of godliness. That's the contents of this mystery, and it also is a suggestion of our obligation. That is, those who have believed in Jesus Christ, they have the obligation to produce godliness in their lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, having said that by way of introduction we turn to this hexapla of mystery specifically, and the first line of the hymn has to do with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. He says, "God was manifest in the flesh."

Now in the reading of the Scripture I commented on the fact that some of the ancient manuscripts have the word God, and some and more of the older ones, have the expression "he who." In fact the oldest manuscripts that we have of 1 Timothy do have the relative pronoun "he who." In one manuscript, Alexandrinus, one of the better manuscripts of the New Testament, there has been a debate over exactly what is found in that text. Textual critics have debated whether the word theos which means God or the word hos which means he who is genuine in the manuscripts. Some have even gone to investigate the manuscript itself in order to settle the question by visits to the British museum where this manuscript is now found today. You can read in the literature of the discussion of this textual problem, you can read of one textual critic who said, "I went over to the British museum. I took a look at this particular passage, and sure enough the line that distinguishes the theta from the omicron is in that text. And therefore the reading is probably theos, and therefore that tips the scales in favor of that as being what Paul wrote in this place."

Another critic in answer to that has gone over to the British museum, also taken a look at it, and said, "Oh no, it's not there. What the man saw previously was a line from the opposite side of the page, which just so happened to be right through the omicron," and therefore he thought it was really a theta. And so down through the decades this argument has persisted. Unfortunately, manuscripts, like other things, as the years pass the printing fades, and therefore it's probably impossible to be absolutely certain of the rendering of that particular manuscript. Most critics today believe that this text reads "he who was manifest in the flesh."

Now, some think if it reads "he who was manifest in the flesh" that therefore this text is not a text on the deity of Christ. But now wait a minute. Sometimes it pays, after one has decided what the text says, to reflect on it for a moment. Could we say this of any mere man, "he who was manifest in the flesh?" Could we say this of Moses, "he was manifest in the flesh?" Well, let me show you how ridiculous it would be to say something like that by just asking you a question. How else could Moses be manifested except in the flesh? Could we say this of Socrates, he who was manifest in the flesh? Well in what other way could we say something like this? Could we say Paul was manifest in the flesh? Of course, he's a man is he not? John Calvin, he's a man too. Jimmy Carter, he has been manifest in the flesh. We don't say anything when we say that mind you, but nevertheless he has been manifest in the flesh. We could even say Louis Johnson has been manifested in the flesh, but it wouldn't mean anything to us, because every one of us is manifested in the flesh. What would be the great controversy or what would be the great mystery or secret of godliness over that.

Now, let me ask you another question, or let me say another thing to you. If we are talking about manifestation in the flesh, what can we say other than this text "he who was manifested in the flesh" must be either of a man, of an angel, or a devil. It must have reference to one of these, or perhaps to God. And if we say it is "he who" is simply a reference to a man, well then every many has been manifest in the flesh, and there is no

sense whatever in making such a statement concerning any mere man and calling it a secret. It is not a secret. Everybody knows that we all have been manifested in the flesh. Well then, if we say it was an angel what angel was ever manifest in the flesh? Oh, you might say if you know a little bit about the Bible, was not the angel of Jehovah manifest in the flesh? Well, yes the angel of Jehovah was manifest in the flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ. You might even say "entertained angels unawares" as if they were men. Yes, they were manifested in the flesh, but what would be the secret of that when we also go on to read here, "seen of angels." And angel manifest in the flesh and now seen of angels, what's so secret about that? Well, nothing would be secret about that.

Well, we said it also might conceivably be a reference to the devil or to a devil, "he who was manifest in the flesh" the devil. Well, we also read at the end of this that he was received up in glory. So I hope it was not the devil the apostle was talking about. For he says here that he was received up in glory, so if it's not a man because it doesn't say anything, if it's not an angel because it doesn't agree with seen of angels as a mystery or secret, and if it's not a devil who else could it be but God. So he who was manifest in the flesh, and God was manifest in the flesh ultimately mean the same thing. The apostle is talking about God manifest in the flesh. He's talking about our Lord Jesus Christ having been manifested in the flesh. There can only be, this can only be a reference to him, "he was manifest in the flesh."

Now, that's an amazing statement, "God manifest in the flesh" the Son of God, the second person of the trinity manifest in the flesh. Bronson Alcott, the father of Louisa May Alcott, the author of *Little Women, Little Women*, and other works, was a New England seer and dreamer, and he was responsible for a certain movement that obtained some popularity in his day. And ultimately there was a society in England that was based upon some of the views of Bronson Alcott. He took a trip to England to visit some of them, and during the course of his visit there he had a little conversation with Carlyle, and in the midst of his conversation with Carlyle he said he could sincerely say just as much

as Jesus of Nazareth said that he was one with the Father. "Yes," replied Carlyle, "but Jesus got men to believe him." [Laughter] Now, in the case of Bronson Alcott he could never get anybody to believe him, that he was really one with the Father. In fact, no one that I know of has ever been able to get men to believe that he is one with the Father except our Lord Jesus Christ. God was manifest in the flesh in him.

Now he says he was "manifest in the flesh." The fact that it says he was manifest in the flesh would suggest, at least suggest, the preexistence of the Son of God, that he existed and then he was manifested in the flesh. Now, that is true to what the Bible says about him. Back in Daniel chapter 3, just to pull one incident out of the Old Testament, in the case of the ruler in Babylon, three of those Hebrews were cast into the fiery furnace, or rather the den of lions. And there finally the king looks down and he sees the three men, but he also sees somebody else there. He says, "Who did you cast in?" The said, "We threw in those three fellows" He said, "Ah, but I see four men," notice he said he saw four men, "and one of them is like a son of the gods." A man, and yet like the son of the gods. It was one of the preexistent appearances of our Lord Jesus Christ. Manifest, that suggests his preexistence.

There is a text we often quote at this time of year, "Thou Bethlehem Ephrata, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me who is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." There is a point in time in which he shall come forth from thee, Bethlehem, but his comings forth, the same root in the Hebrew text, his comings forth or his goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. He has often come out in his ministry as the angel of Jehovah, as the preexistent Son of God. So God was manifest in the flesh. He existed before this time, but he was manifest in the flesh. John uses this expression too. He was manifest to take away our sins.

Now, he was manifest in the flesh, he is now a man. He is not an angel. He is a man manifest in flesh. He is one of us. There were individuals in the early days of the

Christian church who were not troubled by the deity of the Son of God so much as they were troubled by his humanity, and so they thought of God as having only seemed to be a God-man. He was really God who came down into our midst, but he didn't possess true humanity. He was not one of us; he only seemed to be a man. And they were called Docetics, because the Greek term *doceo* means "to seem" as well as "to think." And it has some other forces as well. Docetics, docetism one of the early Christian heresies. Those who thought our Lord was simply God and said that he only seemed to be fully man. Paul says, "God was manifest in the flesh." And John the Apostle speaks frequently to this point as well, saying that those who say that Jesus Christ has not been manifested in the flesh are really of anti-Christ. So here he was manifest in the flesh. He's not an angel. He's a man, and the fact that he's a man manifest in the flesh and now glorified at the right hand of the Father, in glorified flesh means that flesh, humanity, is now at the right hand of the throne of God.

Now, that has great comfort and great assurance for Christians, because we in our covenantal head are now seated with him at the right hand of the Father. That is the guarantee that those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ shall someday be there in the presence of the almighty triune God. It is a magnificent statement of Scripture that he is at the right hand of the throne of God as the covenantal pledge that we who are in him shall be there too.

Now line two, "God was manifest in the flesh," there is enough for a sermon in that, but the apostle goes on to say "he was justified in the Spirit." He refers to his vindication. Now the Authorized Version has that word Spirit capitalized as if it were a reference to the Holy Spirit. It could be that, but the term may also be simply translated to a small "s" and then the reference would be not to the Holy Spirit but the personal spirit of our Lord. Remember when he was on the cross he said, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit," little "s" his own personal spirit. Now, in the light of the contrast with the word flesh that has just proceeded. That's a word of humanity. It is much more likely

that this is also a word of humanity, and so we should translate this "justified in the spirit" with a little "s." That is, he was vindicated in his own human spirit. The reference is ultimately to his resurrection. For when he was raised from the dead by the Father, he was vindicated as the Son of God. In fact, he was appointed, Paul says, "Son of God of power by virtue of the resurrection from the dead." Vindicated, everything that Jesus Christ said that he was received its vindication when the Father raised him from the dead. When he said, "I forgive sins," the Father in raising him from the dead says, "Yes, he forgives sins." When he says that he is the eternal Son of God, the Father in raising him from the dead affirms the truth of what he said, he is the eternal Son of God. When he says that all judgment has been committed into the hands of the Son of Man, that has been confirmed by his resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. When he says he's coming again a second time, that is affirmed by the fact that he is vindicated by his Spirit in the resurrection, raised up from the dead by the Father. If there is anything that Jesus said that is not true, he could not be raised from the dead by the Father and vindicated in his spirit. And that means, too, that when he says, "I am the only way of salvation," "no man cometh unto the Father," no Gentile, no Jew comes unto the Father but by me, he is affirming something that is vindicated by the resurrection from the dead. And the Father, in effect, says amen to every statement that Jesus made when he raised him from the dead. That really is the issue of the person of Jesus Christ, vindicated in his spirit.

The third of the lines is the self-exhibition to the angels. He says, "He was seen of angels." He worked for men, but he worked in the presence of angels. Angels foretold his birth. The angels sang at his birth. The angels strengthened him in his temptation. The angels consoled him in Gethsemane. The angels sat by the empty tomb. The angels proclaimed his resurrection. The angels comforted the disciples at his ascension. And the angels preached the second coming of the Lord Jesus, for they said, "This same Jesus that you have seen go into heaven shall come again in like manner as ye have seen him enter

into heaven." They preached the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. We often sing, in one of our hymns, "Angels in fixed amazement around our altars hover with eager gaze adore the grace of our eternal lover."

You know, it is possible that the angel reference here is a reference to the evil angel, "seen of angels." But personally I think that's far less likely than what I've just said in exposition of it. I just notice, just simply note that, that some have interpreted "seen of angels" as reference to the fallen angels in token of the fact that they have seen the evidence of their ultimate destruction in the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Line four says that he was proclaimed among the Gentiles. Notice "he is proclaimed" not a program. Heaven has a program that is bound up in a person, the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is he who is preached among the nations, not so much things as he is preached. Now, of course, if we are to preach him, we must preach him according to certain teachings about him. And in preaching him we preach theology about him. We cannot say anything about Jesus Christ that is not theology. So when we read here "he was preached" he is preached as the second person of the trinity who is our Redeemer.

But now, why is this a secret? Why is this a mystery? Paul says, "Great is the mystery of godliness, he was preached among the Gentiles." Doesn't everybody know that? Now, wait a minute, what is the mystery? Is the mystery simply that he was preached? No, that's not a mystery. The mystery is that he was preached among the Gentiles, that's the mystery. For remember when our Lord Jesus came he was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He came in order that he might confirm the promises that the Father made to the nation Israel. In fact, when the Canaanite woman came and asked that he might minister to her needs, he was absolutely silent for a lengthy period of time. He, as a matter of fact, said finally that he couldn't case his crumbs or give his bread to the dogs. That's what the Gentiles were. They were dogs. But she was a woman of faith and some understanding, because the Holy Spirit had given her enough understanding to say, "Ah yes, that's true," but those little doggies are able to get under

the table and get some of the crumbs that fall off of the table. And the Lord Jesus commended her faith, because she had understood her place as being blessed through the Jew. So the fact that he was preached among the Gentiles, that's the mystery, that's the secret, that's what's revealed now as a result of his ministry.

Now the gospel goes out because of rejection by the nation, and Gentiles are gathered in to possess the promises that God gave to Abraham and to his seed. What a magnificent program God has. He passes Gentiles through unbelief into possession of the mercy of salvation and the Jewish people he passes through acceptance into rejection and then ultimate return and possession of the promises through the mercy of God so that both Jews and Gentiles in the end of the present age shall confess "We were saved through the mercy of God." Magnificent plan of God in the word of God, so preached among the Gentiles. Incidentally he says preached, not portrayed in liturgy, preached not drawn by artists, preached not acted in dramatic productions, preached not danced, preached. The great stress of the New Testament rests upon the preaching of the gospel of Christ.

I don't deny that it is possible, providing we have some understanding of the word, to say something about Christ in liturgy or to say something about Christ in art, or to say something about Christ in drama. I don't deny that it is possible to say something about Christ in the dance if the people in the audience already know truth, "tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Asculon lest the uncircumcised from some other communion hear." But we did have a wedding in Believers Chapel in which there was ballet dancing as part of the wedding. Great efforts were made to convince some who participated in it that you could communicate truth concerning marriage by that. I remain unconvinced myself. [Laughter] I don't deny the possibility of some communication of truth to people who already know the truth. But the great stress of the New Testament rests upon preaching, and to my mind in Believers Chapel we should always have the stress upon preaching of

the word of God. The pulpit ought to be central always, not moved off to the side, not put up, but central in the worship of the church.

Now, he also says not only preached among the Gentiles but "received in the world." What's mysterious about that? Well in the light of man's nature that is most remarkable, that he should be received in the world, believed on in the world. Why, think of it. Men are sinners. Men are rebellious. Men are depraved. Men's wills are in rebellion against God, their emotions are corrupt, their understanding is blind, and the fact that one person should respond is truly a remarkable thing. And so we read here, part of this divine secret is that men should believe on him in the world. That's still a divine secret.

And finally he says in the last clause, he says, "received up into glory," line six. That's the ascension, and the session. Now, in the Greek text probably it should read simply "received up in glory" the meaning however is he was received up into glory and is in glory. So our covenant head has finally reached the place where he is in glory, and in being in glory, those who were identified with him have the assurance that they too shall be in glory.

It was 7:22 AM on the morning of April 15, 1865, the gaunt form that was stretched on the bed in the room in the house on 10th Street ceased to breathe. The secretary of the war, Edward M. Stanton turned to the window, pulled down the blind to shut out the bright sunlight, and then turning again and looking down on the silent form of President Lincoln he said, "Now he belongs to the ages." That's the shortest biography of Abraham Lincoln, "Now he belongs to the ages." It's one of the best. But after all there is only one person who truly belongs to the ages, and it is he who to whom the ages belong, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who is the subject of the secret of godliness. As Paul says, "great is that secret." He was "manifest in the flesh." He was vindicated in his spirit. He was "seen by angels." He was "preached unto the Gentiles." He was "believed on in the world." And he was "received up in glory." And the day is

coming from that glory he shall return to complete the phase of the program of God associated with his second coming. May God speak to your heart through this great hexapla of mystery. And if you do not know him, may through the grace of the Holy Spirit, you come to a faith and trust in him that means the forgiveness of sins. We invite you to come to Christ and receive that forgiveness of sins through faith, not by baptism, not by joining the church, not by attending the ordinances, not by being a good citizen, not by culture, education, simply through faith in the Son of God. Come to him. Believe in him. What more wonderful time to do so in this season of the year, when we celebrate the incarnation. May God in his grace urge you and bring you to him.

Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these wonderful texts the apostle has given us. We praise Thee that God was manifest in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit. How comforting it is to know that human nature has been exalted and glorified and we have the assurance, the pledge that our inheritance shall someday...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]