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God's Great Mystery

1 TIMOTHY 3:14-16

Introduction

1. What motivates us to do the things we do in life?
2. You might be thinking, "that question has a number of answers" and you are right.
3. We generally eat because we are hungry and sleep because we are tired.
4. We work in order to provide the money necessary to pay our bills and provide for our families.
5. Many of us are motivated by altruism — that unselfish devotion to the welfare of others. We have seen a lot of that over the last months.
6. Scripture teaches us that many are motivated by the wrong things. John referred to them as,
 - a. "The desires of the flesh"
 - b. "The desires of the eyes"
 - c. "The boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:16).
7. Two weeks ago we looked at what the apostle Peter had to say about living "for the will of God" (1 Peter 4:2).
8. As a matter of fact, Peter has had much to say about the kind of life we live:
 - a. We are to fervently love one another from our heart (1 Peter 1:22).
 - b. We are to "abstain from sinful desires, which war against [our souls]" (1 Peter 2:11).
 - c. We are to be people who . . .
 - 1) Strive for harmony and are sympathetic toward one another (1 Peter

3:8a).

- 2) Are kindhearted and humble in spirit (1 Peter 3:8b).
 - 3) Are hospitable to one another and who use our gifts to serve one another (1 Peter 4:9,10).
9. But what motivates us to do all these things? This is where today's reading comes in.

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10. Up to our reading this morning in Paul's first letter to an evangelist named Timothy, he has been writing about how each of us as Christians should conduct ourselves in . . .
- a. "The household of God"
 - b. "The church of the living God"
 - c. "The pillar and support of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

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11. In verse 16, he focuses upon that which motivates such godly living. He calls it "the mystery of godliness."
12. He said "by common confession," "beyond all question," "most certainly" this mystery is "great."
- a. Initially, in titling this sermon, I called it "Our Great Mystery", but it is God's Great Mystery.
 - b. Why? What makes it so great?
13. First, it is great because its focus is upon the coming of Christ into the world
14. Until He arrived, God's plan to save man had been hidden from the world. Now it has been revealed — "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners . . ." (1 Timothy 1:15).
15. Second, it is great because it is in Christ that we see the key to all godly conduct.
16. Here, at the end of 1 Timothy 3, Paul shares with his readers what many believe to be part of a hymn sung by the early church.

17. Its focus is solely upon Jesus Christ.
18. It is in Him that our lives find purpose, meaning and direction.
19. As you and I look at what Paul has to say about Jesus, it is my prayer that Christ, who He is and what He has done will motivate you to live a life that honors Him.

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Jesus Christ Was . . .

A. REVEALED IN THE FLESH

1. Long before God's Son took on human flesh, He spoke to the Father:
"Sacrifice and offering You have not desired,
But a body You have prepared for Me;
In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure.
"Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (In the scroll of the book it is written of Me)
To do Your will, O God.' "" (Hebrews 10:5-7, NASB95)
2. Jesus came to here to do His Father's will.
3. In order to do so, He had to become like us (Philippians 2:7).

He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7, NASB95).

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4. In the prologue to his gospel, John wrote, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14, NASB95)
5. In his first epistle John reiterated this truth.
6. Jesus was not a ghostly apparition, but a man in human flesh who could be seen and touched and looked at.

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"What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen

with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—” (1 John 1:1-2, NASB95)

7. Jesus was “Immanuel” — “God with us” (Matthew 1:23; cf Isaiah 7:14).

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B. VINDICATED IN [BY] THE SPIRIT

1. John the Baptist was able to recognize Jesus as the Son of God because of something which the Spirit did (cf. John 1:29-34).

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and *said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

³⁰“This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’

³¹“I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.”

³²John testified saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.

³³“I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’

³⁴“I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

John 1:29–34 (NASB95)

2. Not only was proven to be God’s Son at His baptism, but also through His resurrection.
3. In Romans 1:4, the apostle Paul said He “was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness . . .” (Romans 1:4, NASB95).

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C. SEEN BY ANGELS

1. Angels were everywhere.
2. Angels foretold the birth of Christ to Mary and then to Joseph (cf. Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 18:24).
3. It was an angel who appeared to the shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem and told them of our Lord's birth (Luke 2:9-11).
4. Immediately following his announcement, a multitude of the heavenly host appeared, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

(Luke 2:14, NASB95)

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5. After the devil left our Lord following His temptation, “angels came and began to minister to Him” (Matthew 4:11).
6. In the Garden of Gethsemane, while Jesus was agonizing in prayer to His Father, “an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him” (Luke 22:43).
7. Angels not only witnessed His resurrection, but were there to tell the women that He had risen (Matthew 28:5-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:4-6; John 20:11-12).
8. Angels were present with the disciples when Jesus ascended to Heaven (Acts 1:10-11).

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D. PROCLAIMED AMONG THE NATIONS

1. Jesus command to the disciples following His resurrection was that they “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15, NASB95).
2. Shortly before his ascension back to His Father, Jesus told the apostles,

“you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NASB95).

3. As a result of the persecution following the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:59), the church was scattered “throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1).
4. Instead of remaining silent, these Christians “went about preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).
5. By the time the apostle Paul wrote letters to the churches in Rome and Colosse, he was able to say, not only had the gospel gone “to the ends of the world” (Romans 10:18), “all creation under heaven” (Colossians 1:23), but that it was also “bearing fruit and increasing” (Colossians 1:6).
6. It is the same gospel which we still proclaim to this day and which we will be proclaiming until the day our Lord returns in glory.

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E. BELIEVED ON IN THE WORLD

1. Just as the good news of Jesus has been proclaimed throughout the world, so has also been believed.
2. The apostle John wrote this of Jesus in the beginning of his gospel:

“He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,” (John 1:10–12, NASB95)
3. Only God knows how many have believed the gospel since Peter proclaimed it for the first time, almost 2,000 years ago, in Jerusalem.
4. From the preaching of 12 men has come a movement unlike any the world has ever seen.
5. Today, all over the world, you and I have brothers and sisters in Christ who

will gather in worship and continue to proclaim our Lord's death, burial and resurrection until He comes again.

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F. TAKEN UP IN GLORY

1. I don't think that any of us have ever seen a person who just started ascending from the earth without the aid of any machine.
2. I imagine our reaction would have been the same as the apostles had we been there that day and watched as Jesus was lifted up from the earth into heaven.

“And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.” (Luke 24:50–51, NASB95)

“And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:9, NASB95)

“Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,” (Hebrews 8:1, NASB95)

3. Imagine the glorious reception which the angels gave Him when our Lord sat down at His Father's right hand.

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4. It must have been something similar to what John describes in Revelation 5:11-12.

“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”” (Revelation 5:11–12, NASB95)

Conclusion

1. There you have it, God's great mystery of godliness.
2. The Son of God came into this world to live as one of us.
 - a. The Holy Spirit affirmed that He was God's Son.
 - b. Angels can testify to the fact.
3. Untold numbers have heard the good news and believed in Him.
4. He now sits on His throne in glory interceding on our behalf and awaiting the day of His return to take home the redeemed.
5. Will you and I be among that number?
 - a. As "the household of God," we are to reflect through our relationships the person of Jesus Christ.

We're part of the family, that's been born again
Part of the family, whose love knows no end
For Jesus has saved us, and made us his own
Now we're part of the family, that's on its way home

- b. We are "the church of the living God."
 - 1) It is among us that God actually dwells and is at work.
 - 2) The world around us should sense that the living God is here.
 - c. We are "the pillar and support of the truth."
 - 1) We demonstrate God's truth both by our words and conduct.
 - 2) We need to hold forth the word of life so that it illuminates the darkness in which Satan has enshrouded the world.
6. Jesus lives and He has made it possible for you to go home to live with Him.
7. Does He consider you one of His own?