

1Tim 24-04-07a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. Today is the 7th of April, 2024. Only one day left in human history.

It's all ending in the eclipse tomorrow. So whatever you want to get done, get done. But we are continuing our study.

We're in 1 Timothy and from that place in chapter 3, we have come to look at the mystery that Paul speaks of in talking about the mystery of godliness. Great is the mystery of godliness. And from that we have been looking at the nature of the things that are uniquely communicated to us by and through the Apostle Paul.

And that includes the sevenfold aspects that we have noted. And we've gone back to look at these in detail. The first of them is the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

The nature of it, the extent of it, the purpose of it, the implications of it were unforeseen in the Old Testament. There were prophecies of Emmanuel and so on. But the fullness and certainly the application for us of the incarnation of Jesus is what we are now looking at.

The first of the seven aspects of the mystery gospel or the previously unrevealed aspects of the gospel to demystify a little bit. And that's what we're currently looking at. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and we'll pick up where we left off.

Father, how grateful we are for the blessings that you bestow on us through the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for his ongoing presence at your side, interceding and representing us and enabling us in him to partake of the wonderful privileges and blessings, potentials and opportunities that are ours as your children and as members of his body. We pray that as we look at these passages together that the Holy Spirit will bless it to our hearts in a way that is meaningful, that changes us in the positive direction so that we are more closely conformed to the image of Christ, to your own image, that we in that way reflect your glory, draw others to you through the Lord Jesus and accomplish the purpose for which you put us on this earth and have provided all of these wonderful provisions.

And we ask it in Jesus name. Amen. So our passage in 1st Timothy chapter three, without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness.

God was, and of course, you have a New King James text note there, the word God is not present. And the word godliness is eusebia, which it doesn't really have a theos element in it either. And so the translators here and in other versions have tried to helpfully specify that this is talking about God, but it doesn't say God.

Not that there's not truth in that statement, but the word eusebia was used by Romans

and Greeks and others to talk about the, what is considered to be in whatever context, genuine spirituality, genuine respect for a God or the God or the gods. And you could put the word religion that has a lot of baggage with it today, but the higher responsibilities of man, the things that go beyond the material and the, the gratification of the senses, it goes to meaning and purpose and definition in life. And so eusebia is unique to human beings, dogs.

We like to think they worship us, our pets we have relationships with, but this idea of sensitivity to the moral and ethical and higher order of invisible truths, this was eusebia. And for us, this has a very specific form. Great is the mystery of our revelation from God of those things of spiritual truth.

And this should define us people who were devotees of different gods in Egypt or in Babylon or in Assyria or in the, the nations of Canaan in later days, the Greek and Roman pantheons people would, who were serious about transcendent truths, tried to find someone that they would live their lives to please, that would define them, that would empower them, and that would give their lives some sense of purpose. And that was eusebia. So it's a general purpose term, but it has a specific meaning and application for us.

And for us, there is a revelation of previously uncommunicated truths. Great is the mystery. Great is the mystery.

And he says, there's no argument about this. It is profound. It is important.

It is life-changing. That's what the word great means. We were having a discussion about the words that have been used over the past decades for something we approve of.

And it's kind of funny to think about the cultural changes so that we go from groovy to cool to bad to, if you fill in the blank here, and in earlier years of my generation, people began to say that something was great. And if you look at text messages, I would love to know the statistics of how many times the word great occurs in texts and in emails. And if you could do that, that would be great.

Oh, that's great. Great. Thank you very much.

And we sort of suspend the use of our imagination and trying to widen our vocabulary because we can overuse words. And so when we say great is the mystery, we need to pause and think, what exactly is the nature of this kind of greatness? Is it great in scope? Great in content? Great in its meaning for us? Does it mean that it's profound? Does it mean that it's extensive? What does the word great mean? And without belaboring that point for us, it means it is central. It is extremely important and extremely beneficial.

We are grateful — to make a bit of a pun, the great in grateful isn't G-R-E-A-T — but we are thankful for what is revealed and what was reserved and is special to us as believers

in the church age, as members of the body of Christ. These things are profound. They are important.

They are central. They define us. And it is the center.

It is the object of our faith. You've heard it said many times that the merit of faith is in its object. It is what is believed that carries the power.

There are people who have tremendous faith in things that inevitably disappoint them because the object isn't worthy of that level of faith. They can believe in a system. They can believe in a diet.

They can believe in a person. They can believe in a political point of view. They can believe in a cause.

But most of those things end up being fallible, end up disappointing. And the faith may be extremely strong, but if you are trusting a bald tire and your faith is very strong, the outcome is only as good as the tire, not how much you believe that it will hold air, not blow out. So without controversy, without dispute, nobody argues that when it comes to our relationship with God through Christ, the characteristics, the ethics, the morals, the spiritual truths are profound.

And then it says, who was manifested in the flesh? That's why they chose the word godliness here for Eusebio, because you kind of need to get God in there. Somebody was manifested in the flesh and it's indefinite here. It just says who.

But what is our context? It's what we've been looking at in terms of the three different categories in which we endeavor to express love. These things I write to you that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. So the context tells us what is great and who we are talking about.

But if you want to fill something in here for the indefinite pronoun who, it really ought to be Jesus Christ, because this is the whole subject of the book. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God, our savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope. So this is his subject.

And just because he doesn't state it doesn't mean it isn't talking about the Lord Jesus. But Jesus Christ was manifested in the flesh. And this is a great mystery, a great previously unrevealed truth that the Son of God would be manifest.

So the implications of this incarnation, it's one thing to say this is a wonderful theological truth. God was manifested in the flesh. But what does it mean? Well, we've been looking at that over the past many weeks.

What does it mean that Jesus Christ circulated in our midst? Why didn't he simply descend from the angel ladder that goes to heaven and come to a high mountaintop and lay himself down on an altar and pay for the sins of the world in a glorious angel-attended visionary scene? Jesus spent 33 years in our midst, and there were those who were close to him and had one another love. There were those who were in his periphery and who received neighbor love. And there were those who were at a greater distance, some of whom were actively in opposition and were enemies, others who were indifferent, apathetic, or who would stand at a distance and mock when he was crucified, and so on.

So what is the implication here that he was manifest in the flesh? He has left for us an example of how we ought to conduct ourselves. And in looking at the nature of expressing love, which is our great commandment, great commandment, the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all of our heart, soul, and strength. The second for Israel was to love one's neighbor as oneself.

Jesus gave a new and higher command, to love one another as I have loved you. And this is an inner circle that did not previously exist. The Holy Spirit was not yet given.

Christ was not yet glorified. Now that the Holy Spirit is present and we have a unique collection of believers who are the people of God, we are defined by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the love, the surpassing love, that goes beyond neighbor love. It is at a higher level, based on a higher standard, measured according to Christ's love for us.

And that love has a limited target area. We cannot express that love to everyone. Jesus did not express his one another love to everyone.

It was limited to the disciples. Those who come and listen, Jesus said, you are my father and brothers and mother and sister. Specifically, when his mother and brothers came to see him and they said, your relatives are outside, he said, you who are here, who are following, who are listening, who are endeavoring to enter into the truth communicated by Jesus Christ himself, you are my mother and brothers and sisters.

And he did not express that to everyone. He did not express that to the Pharisees. He did not express it to the Romans.

He did not express it to those who were outside the lost sheep of the house of Israel. There are concentric circles. So the incarnation of Jesus Christ is important because it guides us.

Anytime we have a question about how to treat others, we can look to the example of the Lord Jesus. Sadly, the example of the Lord Jesus is being misunderstood, misinterpreted, misrepresented in the postmodern church, in the progressive and mainstream areas of church. This love is represented as extending to people who are

actively living a life of perversion and are unrepentant about it, who are embracing concepts that are antithetical to God's will and God's word, and that there should nevertheless be love.

And we've seen that in many cases, this is justified on the assumption that every human being bears the image of God. This is not the case, and we've studied that in recent weeks as well. We ourselves are not born with the image of God.

In Christ, we recover the image of God. We are being renewed in the image of the creator in Christ. And this, of course, is going to lead us to our second element of the mystery gospel revealed by Paul, which is the indwelling of Christ.

We have the incarnation of Christ as the first point, and we've spent a lot of time on that. We're going to be moving this morning forward to the indwelling of Christ, which again is unique. It didn't happen in the past.

It is a special privilege and opportunity for us. But in conclusion, looking at our central passage, who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, declared righteous, acceptable in God's sight. Justification very simply is acceptability in God's sight.

This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. He was justified in and by the spirit. And this is unique.

This is one of the central things that defines us. This helps us understand the one and others, because this one another set of commands, half of which are love, forgive, and so on. There are over 50 of those commands that we have looked at, and those have to be accomplished in a reciprocal manner in the spirit.

In the spirit, justified in the spirit, acceptable in the eyes of God. And our love has to be acceptable in the spirit, the way we treat others, what we choose to do and not do, what we reflect and what we separate from, what we distance ourselves from has to be in the spirit. And this is where prayer is so important, because how do our prayers work? Our prayers are taken to heaven, and God's answers are revealed to us in and through the spirit of God, speaking to us with the word of God, taking our prayers and presenting them before the throne in groanings that cannot be uttered.

So to discern where we exercise one another love, where it is neighbor love, and where it is those who are outside, it is helpful to remember that one another love is always in the realm of the Holy Spirit, and it is always reciprocal. It is exercised in the body where there is unity, and where it isn't just a formal declaration that I am a Christian or I believe in Jesus, but where, and this is an instinctive perception. We know this when we are with others who have an active presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit in their life.

I've mentioned it many times, those of us with some military training know that military aircraft, for decades now, have had a special radio circuit that is called IFF, and it's

Identification Friend or Foe. And when aircraft encounter each other, if you are in an active place where you don't know who else is in the air, the aircraft can recognize other aircraft that belong to the United States. With this, to prevent launching a missile in haste, you get a radar contact and you assume it's an enemy.

Well, IFF says, no, this is a friendly, don't fire. And we have sort of an IFF in our soul. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and helps us recognize other children of God who are in that active, narrow road, straight gate identity.

So this is very handy. I appreciate that God doesn't leave us to try to figure these things out with speculation or guessing or hoping or wishing. Sometimes we wish that people were within that circle where we could exercise reciprocal love, and they're just not.

And it takes discipline and a priority on obedience where our emotion says, but I want to enfold, I want to embrace, I want to try to love someone into a better relationship with myself and with God. And love is not the agency. I cannot tell you, and we'll, in coming weeks, we're going to be looking at what people believe accomplishes the Christian life, where the power comes from.

I just read a summary where there were four things and what was glaringly absent. We all know, when I ask this question, all of you can answer it. How does the power of God come into the life of a believer? It is the Spirit of God and the Word of God.

When you see people talking about this is how to operate as a believer in the world, and they don't mention the Holy Spirit and they don't mention the Word, watch out. But this is mainstream. This is ubiquitous.

It's everywhere. Well, it is what you do. It is spirituality by works, dressed up in new clothes.

It is the old legalism. It is the old, I will bring you the salad instead of the slain lamb, that is as old as Cain and was not acceptable to God and led Cain down a terrible road. Because people inevitably, when they begin to think that spirituality is based on what they have decided are good works, usually social action, social justice, trying to have influence in the world, trying to change circumstances by whatever means.

In the same way that Cain, when he went down the road of works, began to resent his brother who was being obedient to God, there will be division in the body and these believers will attack those who are endeavoring to live in grace and by faith in the same way that the Pharisees who were trying to do spirituality by works attacked the Lord Jesus and his disciples and his followers in the early days of the church. There is an inevitable animosity. There is an inevitable opposition.

And condemnation of those who don't follow whatever someone's chosen road of works,

of use of Bea by works. So these things are really important just to guide us in our human relationships. The incarnation of Jesus Christ, He became a man.

Remember what John says? He dwelt among us. The Word became flesh Why doesn't it skip the next phrase? The Word became flesh and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten. What would be missing if I quoted it that way? The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And to misrepresent the Lord Jesus, I hope you never say this, I hope you never believe it if you hear someone else say it, but when people say, Jesus, friend of sinners, you find it everywhere. Jesus, friend of sinners. Well, Jesus was a friend of sinners.

I should be a friend of sinners. And rubbing out the lines of distinction and the perception and the discretion and discernment that is required from us, it is like saying you're against immigration instead of you are against illegal immigration. And people will conflate and combine those two ideas and say, if you are against people swarming over our Southern border, you're anti-immigrant, you hate immigrants.

No, I'm against illegal. The adjective matters. Jesus, friend of repentant sinners.

God commends His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. But God, with His love for the world, did not then go on and save everyone and enter everyone into His family and call everyone children of God and begin to form His image in the hearts of every man. What's the problem with that? No attention to volition, no attention to those who aren't interested and reject.

Anywhere from apathy to outright rebellion, hatred and active opposition and attack. Remember when scripture says, I meant to look up this reference, you'll have to look it up. Behold what manner of love the Father has.

Well, let's behold it. Behold what manner of love the Father has. Well, behold what manner of love the Lord Jesus had.

To whom did Jesus explain the parables? To whom did Jesus devote His attention in training and in experience and increasing? Remember the disciples said, increase our faith, teach us to pray, and Jesus did. That is a different quality of love, a different arena of love than that toward those who were outside, those who were mocking Him. And there's, from a misunderstanding, then there comes this sort of confirmation bias, so that when Jesus is on the cross, we're in the season of Passover and the remembrance of what happened at the crucifixion and the resurrection.

But when they talk about the words from the cross and Jesus says, Father forgive them for they know not what they do. And people say, this is an expression of Jesus' love for everybody. Jesus requested blanket forgiveness.

Father forgive all of them. And it is sad because when you look at the context and take Jesus' words as they were intended, He is not talking about the Pharisees. He is not talking about the Jews who were walking up and down the road, mocking and daring Him to come down from the cross.

If God delights in you so much, if you claim to be the son of the Father, why isn't He taking you down from the cross? The forgiveness that Jesus requested was for the Roman soldiers who didn't know. The Jews were conscious. The Jews knew the claims of the Lord Jesus.

They had heard His teaching. And those who put Him on the cross, using the Romans as a proxy, are not forgiven. And Jesus did not request forgiveness for them.

Our responsibility is to respect respect the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ who came here to leave us an example that we should follow in His steps. Behold the manner of love that the Father has expressed. Behold the manner of love that the Lord Jesus expressed.

And in both the Father and the Son, you see an example of discernment and of self-limitation. And we have to do the same to emulate and to reflect and express the love of God that is in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. We cannot be indiscriminate.

We can't be incautious because we will, in an endeavor to love, do harm. All of us have seen examples of someone who, because they love their child, they can't bear to discipline them. They can't bear to contradict them or deny them a desire or a wish.

And it ends up destroying the child. As they grow older, they don't cultivate essential qualities like self-control, patience, sensitivity to the situation and the needs of others. It encourages self-indulgence and self-gratification and insensitivity to others by not loving a child enough to discipline them.

And to refuse to have a wall, to refuse to have a structure and justify it on the basis of love is a grave error. It's a grave misperception. The human soul, especially in a child, is looking for boundaries.

It's looking for structure because that is the source of security. If I know that this is firm and solid and immovable, I can count on it. It's always that way.

I can go this far and no further. And the need for security that is inbuilt in every child is met with structure and with limitation and with the training and the guidance that that structure provides. This is love.

It is not love to deny a child the structure they need to guide them until they can stand on their own. But people think that it is love. In the same way, if we misdirect one another love and one another commands outside the realm of the active and

appreciated ministry of the Holy Spirit, it is going to backfire.

It is going to hurt rather than help. And you talk about killing someone with kindness. You create an unhealthy kind of dependency.

You mislead because people assume that the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit of sin and righteousness and judgment isn't important. That sin doesn't matter. Righteousness isn't an issue.

Judgment must be some kind of a mean old judge that would judge me, some kind of a divine boogeyman. Because believers accept me. They don't separate from my sin.

They don't seem to be shocked by it or sobered by it or unaccepting of it. It's okay. It's not an issue.

And you take away the very impact that the Holy Spirit is here to create. Consciousness of sin is necessary. Understanding of righteousness is necessary.

And the inevitability of judgment is profound. We are the presence of the Holy Spirit. If we're not here, the Holy Spirit is not here.

Think about your inception of the tribulation and revelation of the man of sin. The Holy Spirit is present in and through us. And so if we obscure sin and righteousness and judgment in an effort to love in a misguided way, we are now an enemy of the cross.

We are fallen from grace. We are a hindrance to God's work. And God is going to have to work around us to get to people who ought to be seeing Him reflected in us.

And the reflection of the Lord Jesus is not just love. It is also judgment. People don't want to talk about Jesus giving the parable of the sheep and goats where the goats depart into eternal fire.

They don't want to talk about the wheat and the tares where the tares are gathered into bundles and burned. Jesus doesn't love the tares so much that they turn into wheat. He doesn't convict the goats and they all hang their heads and kick their toe in the dirt and walk over and become sheep.

There is judgment. And to blur over and belittle and dismiss and hide the fact that there is a coming judgment, that's not love. That is a complete lack of responsibility in the same way as failing to discipline a child and train up a child in the way they should go.

That's not love. That's self-indulgence. I don't want to feel bad disciplining a child.

It's selfish. It's self-gratification. And you're harming the child in the interest of your emotions.

And that principle has other expressions beyond child raising. Well, that's why these mystery truths are so important. They are central to how we live our life and to remember who we are and why we are here and to pursue love and to pursue peace.

We have guidance from the scripture. We pursue peace with all men. If I could summarize the three areas of love, one another love is that is intimate love in the realm of the Holy Spirit.

So that is Holy Spirit love, the love that is in our hearts because of His presence. That's the innermost circle. That is loving as Christ loved us.

The second area is neighbor love, loving your neighbor as yourself. To summarize this in a single word, it is respect. If you respect someone, even if you have disagreements, even if they're the cranky neighbor across the fence, if their dog is in the road, you would stop and try to get that dog back into the yard so that your neighbor's dog is not harmed.

If there's water running out from under a threshold, your neighbor is away on a trip and you see water coming out of an exterior door, you call the water department. You try to alert the neighbor. It's respect.

You don't expect it to be reciprocal. It is do unto others as you would have others do unto you. That's respect.

Neighbor love is basically respect. The way you would like to be treated, treat others. It's not intimate.

I don't expect a complete stranger to throw open the doors of their home and bring me in and feed me meals. That's in a different circle of love. But I would hope that if my house was catching fire, they would call the fire department and try to let me know.

It's respect. The outermost circle is the area of discretion and discernment. We endeavor to be a beacon of God's light and glory.

It is the most passive of the three. This is to the extent that it is up to us, live peaceably. Don't enter into opposition, contradiction, attack, crusades, endeavors to legislate and change those who are outside.

At that most distant level, there are many who are active enemies. Only when they come in contact with us, now neighbor love applies because we're in contact. Those who are outside, we pretty much have no contact.

We are visible to them and they are visible to us. But as soon as we start having interaction, now you're in the neighbor category. So those who operate a slave market and the slaves in that market, for that matter, those are outsiders in Jesus' day.

Did Jesus take his disciples down there and try to do something about the social ill of slavery and mistreatment and Roman oppression? Did Jesus go down to the red light district and try to do something with regard to prostitution? And did he go outside and picket the tax collectors and say, you're doing something heinous? It wasn't until they came into his house on his land that Jesus drove the money changers out. And then only twice in three plus years of public ministry. But those who are outside, we recognize the visibility.

We don't want our good to be spoken of as evil. We want to shine a light so that others will see the quality of our life and be drawn to God. And that's it.

To try to interfere in their national exercise of self-defense or attacking other nations or whatever. Jesus never said word one about the Romans invading other countries. Didn't opine on Roman politics or Roman governmental actions.

What manner of love did Jesus have for the world? What manner of love does the father have? There is an opportunity. There is a light shining. And for people who are drawn to that light and move out of the outsider category to neighbor category, you have contact with neighbors.

You can feed and clothe and aid a neighbor. If he falls into a ditch, if you pass somebody and he's in a ditch, that's a neighbor. Who is my neighbor? Someone with whom I have contact.

Someone that I can personally exercise discernment and respect and do for them what I would hope they would do for me. That innermost circle of the one another's has to be in the realm of active presence and power and ministry of the Holy Spirit. So there is one another love, there is respect, and there is do no harm.

Shine a light, live peaceably to the extent that it is possible with those who are outside. And that's so helpful in determining how to vote, in determining how to respond to attacks. Where are they coming from? Are they outsider attacks? Live peaceably.

If they are neighbor attacks, that's love your enemy. Do good to those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use you. They have to be in the neighbor category for you to pray intelligently.

For you to do good, you have to have contact. You can't mail off dollars to somebody on the other side of the world and expect that God is going to bless that. You don't know what you are doing.

So very helpful, very practical. Well, that is the summary of what we've seen over the last many weeks of endeavoring to be the body of Christ. Endeavoring to express and fulfill the love that Jesus talks about, that Paul the Apostle talks about.

Especially with regard to the mystery, this inner circle of the Holy Spirit was never spoken of to Israel. Israel was given neighbor love. Why? The Holy Spirit was not yet given.

We are in the realm of the Spirit, and there is a newer and higher love. Restricted to, in the same way that there are things you do for your family you would not normally do for those who are outside, it's family love. Family, neighbors, it is respect.

Those who are outside, it is example. It is an example. Well, we'll pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to move to point number two in our seven-fold revelation of the mystery in and through the Apostle Paul. So interesting that Jesus commissions Paul to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, and also to be the one who reveals these aspects of the good news. So when we come back, we'll take a look at the indwelling of the Lord Jesus Christ.