

The Fortress of Truth

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Preacher: Davis Morgan

[0 : 00] This morning, Pastor Davis Morgan from our sister church, Westside PCA, here in town, is going to bring God's word to us. And so, Davis, welcome.

New Testament reading is found in 1 Timothy chapter 3. 1 Timothy chapter 3, verses 14 through 16. So great to be with you again.

Cheyenne Mountain. And I believe I was here on November 1st. And that was the Sunday that we started 1 Timothy at Westside Church. We have wrapped up that book.

But one of my favorite passages is verses 14 through 16 in chapter 3 of 1 Timothy. And so, I thought I would bring that word to you today as we draw near to the end of 2020.

So, hear the word of our Lord, His holy, His inspired word that He has kept and preserved for us, His people, today.

[1 : 05] 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 14 and following. The Apostle Paul writes, This is the word of God.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Let us pray for our time in His word. Join with me, please. Lord God, we thank you for this time that we have, that you have in your great providence you have ordained for us, that we would be here this day to sit under the preaching of your word.

God, we confess as your people. We confess as those who perhaps are here that are not part of your people. But you are drawing to yourself.

Lord, we all have in common our need for your spirits and our need for you to reveal the glorious gospel of your Son.

Amen. We pray, we ask for this. We ask for the gift of understanding, of illumination, of knowledge of who Jesus Christ is. We also pray for the little theologians that are here.

[2 : 36] Lord, the children that are sitting under the preaching of your word. We pray that you too would work in their hearts to give them understanding of these things. Take the things of Christ and make them real to us here today.

We pray in His holy name. Amen. Amen. In the darkness, something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing.

It seemed to come from all directions at once. Its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself. There were no words. There was hardly even a tune.

But it was beyond comparison. The most beautiful noise they had ever heard. Those present looked above them and saw the blackness filled with stars.

And each of them were singing as well. But the voice of the stars grew fainter as the voice of the one singing drew near. Wind came rushing.

[3 : 34] The blackness of the sky turned to gray. Hills began to stand up around them. The sky changed to pink and then to a brilliant gold. And as soon as the voice swelled to the mightiest sound it could produce, the sun rose over the hills.

And from the sun's light, they all could see the source of the singing. A large golden lion standing in the middle of the valley.

With each step, the singing lion took with its large paws trees and mountains and animals and rivers and flowers and all sorts of lovely things were bursting forth into existence until finally all was created.

Narnia had been created by the voice of the lion. Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, awake, love, think, speak, be walking trees, be talking beasts, be divine waters.

Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, near the sky, be talking to the snake, be on the ground. This scene is from C.S. Lewis' *The Magician's Nephew*, and it brilliantly captures the creation story, written in such a way as to capture the compelling nature of what Christianity is from beginning to end.

[4 : 57] And that is a story. It's the story of all stories. It's the greatest story ever told because as J.R.R. Tolkien told his good friend, Jack Lewis, his friend, Jack Lewis, who at the time was struggling to believe such a story, Tolkien said, quote, this story has entered history and become the primary story.

That's what sets it apart from all other stories. Other stories may talk a big game, but when the time comes, when they are measured up against God's story, they fold every time.

This is why the British playwright and author Dorothy Sayers called the Christian story, quote, the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man. And the meaning of it all, she says, the dogma, what it means, she said very famously, is the drama, the doctrine or the dogma is the drama.

Who God is and what he has done in history, recorded for us in Scripture, is the most thrilling and the most exciting story that you and I will ever encounter because this story has happened in time and space.

It has happened in history, which is a good reminder for us. It's a great reminder for us who sit here this morning under the preaching of this story on the last Sunday of the year.

[6 : 27] And what a year it has been. A global pandemic, shutdowns, mask mandates, social distancing, civil, social, political unrest.

If anything sums up 2020, it's unrest. It's uncertainty. And it's a very stark reminder for us not to hold on to the things of this present age because they can be turned upside down in a moment.

They can be taken away just like that. With such uncertainty and unrest, we might be tempted to think that there really is no certainty, that there really is no truth to hold on to.

Or at the very least, the truth that I decide to believe in is what Carl Trueman calls, quote, the triumph of the therapeutic self.

In other words, whatever I feel is true. But as you well might imagine, that's even a more shaky ground.

[7 : 50] That's even more unstable to stand on. Because as my wife could tell you, as long as I have my coffee first thing in the morning, I'm a happy guy. But if I'm hungry, if I'm tired, or if I've only had one cup of coffee, I can be quite unpleasant.

Or my feelings may tell me one thing. My kids haven't emptied the dishwasher after I asked them five minutes to go. Therefore, I'm angry.

When in reality, they simply didn't hear me say for them to empty the dishwasher. They got distracted by a phone call from their grandmother.

My feelings may tell me to be angry, but I'm missing crucial information that would say, there's no need to be angry. What I'm saying is this. While our feelings are important, and they are, in terms of sustaining us in the midst of uncertainty, they're unreliable.

And here's what I have for you today. Something from outside of us. Something that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, that's kept in heaven for you.

[9 : 09] Something that cannot be shaken, because it is made possible, it is guaranteed by the One who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

That though the mountains may be moved into the heart of the sea, though the waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at the swelling, we will not fear, for our God is our refuge.

Our God is our strength. And through His Son, He is able to save you and I, Hebrews chapter 7 says, to the uttermost.

To the uttermost. This refuge in Christ is what Martin Luther called our mighty fortress. A bulwark, a foundation that is never failing.

Luther was reflecting upon Psalm 46. And in our text this morning, 1 Timothy 3, 14 and 16, but particularly verse 16, Paul is reflecting, Paul too is reflecting upon that same surety, that same foundation, that certainty that we have in Jesus.

[10 : 19] And here's what we learn in 1 Timothy chapter 3, that not only do we have this foundation, but that we as the church, we are the fortress.

We are the fortress. We are the guardian of that truth. We guard it. We defend it. We use it to defeat the strongholds of the enemy, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 10.

The weapons that we have are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy those arguments, those lofty opinions that are raised up against the knowledge of God, that are raised up against the truth of God, that he has sovereignly revealed in his word for you and for me.

So, we're going to unpack this by looking at Paul's instructions to Timothy and the church. 1 Timothy 3, verses 14 through 16.

And I want to point you to three aspects. I want to point you to the story, I want to point you to the dogma, and I want to point you to the life that results from that.

[11 : 25] The story, we're referring to the action of God. The dogma, we're talking about the meaning of what God has done. And the life is the practice, the response that we are to have to what God has done.

Now, for you little theologians, for the kids that are here today, here's what I like for you to draw, kids, if it's okay with your parents. I like you to draw a scene from your favorite story, your favorite story.

For me, this time of year, I love Charles Dickens' A Christmas Story, or A Christmas Carol, Christmas Story. That's on TNT. A Christmas Carol. I try to read that every year around this time.

So for you kids, I want you to draw a picture of your favorite story or your favorite book that you like to read or that you like to have read to you. And here are the two questions, kids, that I'd like you to listen for, that I'd like you to answer today.

One, what is the Christian story? And two, why do we need to know this story? What is the Christian story? And why do we need to know the Christian story? Now first, we're going to start in verse 16 and then move back and finish with verse 14.

[12 : 37] So look with me first at the story of Scripture that's found in verse 16. Paul says in 1 Timothy 3, 16, great indeed is the mystery of godliness.

Now why is Paul saying this? What Paul is alluding here to is twofold. He's alluding to the pagan mystery religions or cults of the ancient world.

And in particular, he is alluding to or referencing the confession that was there in Ephesus at the time in the first century. If you remember the story in Acts chapter 19, when Paul was in Ephesus, he turned the entire city upside down by preaching the gospel.

And he performed an exorcism on a girl, a slave girl there in the market. She was possessed by a demon. And Paul, he exorcised that demon.

He demonstrated the power of the gospel over the pagan mystery religions of the time. And the city's response to this was great hostility to the apostle. And it says there in Acts 17 or Acts 19 that the entire city had gathered in the amphitheater there in Ephesus and they were chanting, great is Artimaheus of the Ephesians.

[13 : 57] And so here Paul is both, he is referencing those two common beliefs, common creeds or confessions of Ephesus at the time because this letter was written to Timothy in Ephesus.

And he's alluding to what the culture then held to be sacred and he's shedding light on what is truly sacred. And that is what God says, what God has done and revealed to the world because after he says, great indeed is the mystery of godliness, he unfolds what this mystery is.

It's that God has moved towards us. We cannot move towards him in our sin, but he has moved towards us. God has acted in history. This God, the living God that he says in verse 15, he is the foundation of all religion.

He is the foundation of all worship, all piety, all devotion. And Paul wants us to understand that if we miss this, then we miss him. We miss ultimate reality.

We miss essentially everything if we miss this God. You want to know what is truly great and stunning in the world to see.

[15 : 14] While we might look out these windows and be amazed by the mountains, or earlier this week, we may be amazed when the planets align and we are moved to awe and wonder.

What is truly great and truly stunning, friends, is what Paul says this mystery of godliness is. The mystery meaning it was once hidden.

It was once hidden to us. It was once hidden to us in our darkness, in the darkness of sin. And God now has revealed, revealed this to the world.

He has revealed what Gerhardus Voss said. The chief actor in this drama has come upon the scene. The chief actor has stepped into history.

And you'll notice there, after he says, great indeed is the mystery of godliness, he then presents this in poetic form. Poetic form in verse 16.

[16 : 21] And what we can gather from this text, from other texts like Philippians 2, 5 through 11, for example, you may know that passage, or Colossians 1, 15 through 20.

These commentators are convinced of were early confessions of the church. Which means what we're reading here, in all likelihood, goes back to the very first generation of disciples, the very first generation of the church, those who walked with Jesus when he was here on earth.

And that makes what we see in this early creed, this early confession, that much more remarkable. Because, as New Testament scholar Richard Baucom, he says, quote, the earliest Christology already was the highest Christology of the church.

That's what we see in 1 Timothy 3, 16. The earliest belief about who Jesus is, and Jesus, when he came into this world, was already the highest belief that you could have.

And we find here in this passage, the exaltation of Jesus Christ. What great comfort that is for us, is it not? What great comfort to know that from the very beginning, the church knew who Jesus was, and what he had come to do.

[17 : 44] And they are confessing this for us, so that future generations know who Jesus was, and what he came for. So for us today, friends, this is God's gracious reminder to us about the foundation, the rock, the certainty that we have, this mystery of godliness that he has revealed.

And what has he revealed? First, we see the incarnation. We see the incarnation. Paul says, he was manifested in the flesh. He was justified in the spirit.

This is the revelation of the Son of God. This is the revelation of God in the flesh. The word became flesh, John 1.

And this is the revelation of what Paul has already said in 1 Timothy. He said in chapter 1, it was the words of comfort and promise we heard in our prayer of confession, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

In chapter 2, Paul said that he is the God-man, that he is the unique, the only mediator between us and a holy God.

[18 : 52] He is the only one of his kind. He is, as one commentator said, quote, he is man to God, and he is God to man. He is man to God, and he is God to us. And mediator, mediator is the image of, when we think about mediator kids, think about an oven mitt that you would use to pull something hot out of the oven, like fresh baked chocolate chip cookies.

If you don't use that oven mitt, and you go to grab the tray out of the oven, it will burn your hand, because you cannot touch the temperature of the oven is too hot for us.

But if you put on that oven mitt, it mediates between the heat and your flesh. And that is what Jesus Christ is as our mediator. He is the one who makes us acceptable to God.

He is the one that reconciles us to God. We can be in the presence of God. We can confess our sins to him as we did earlier, and we can trust, we can bank on the promise of 1 John chapter 1, that God is faithful, God is just, to cleanse us and to forgive us of all unrighteousness.

Because Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and us. Second, we see the resurrection. It says there that he was seen by angels.

[20 : 10] He was proclaimed or preached on into the world. This is the proclamation of this mystery of godliness, this God-man who has stepped into the world.

You'll notice that there is no reference to the crucifixion. And this is intentional on Paul's part. This is intentional on the early church's part. Because what are they doing? They are emphasizing the exaltation of Christ.

They are emphasizing the glory, the glory of Christ over all other claims, all other claims of the pagan religions then, and all claims of pagan religions now as well.

Now, what do I mean by that? Anything that attempts to raise itself against the knowledge of God and the exaltation of his son, of this mystery of godliness that has been revealed to the world, by definition, according to the New Testament, is pagan.

It's a pagan religion, and it is to be rejected. As a matter of fact, in 1 Peter 2, God says that all other claims will essentially be crushed by this cornerstone that God himself has laid as the foundation of his house, his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[21 : 32] So do not fear, friends. Do not let your faith be rocked. Because all other claims will be crushed to pieces.

We are to reject them because they are attempting to usurp what God has revealed, what God has done. You may be thinking, well, how can you say that?

How can you say that? To which I would say, I'm not saying it. God is saying it. I am simply the messenger. God doesn't want you or I to misunderstand or misrepresent his message.

Great indeed is the mystery of godliness. And here's exactly what it is. That the Son of God has come in the flesh. That the Son of God has overcome death.

And that the Son of God has ascended back to glory. And we see that in the ascension. And that is the final stanza of it. Paul says that he was believed on in the world.

[22 : 38] He was taken up in glory. This stands, this stands as the summit, the peak, the apex, the apex of God's dealing in history, friends.

That Christ was taken up in glory. He was crowned with glory and honor that's only reserved for God alone. And this is the message, this is the message that you and I, that we are entrusted with as the church.

This is the message that we guard and it's the message that we also proclaim and we defend. Because as Paul says there, this is the message that has been believed on in the world.

This is the message that changes the hearts of you and I. Now what does this mean for us as a church? What does this mean for us as the people of God?

This is the dogma, the dogma, the meaning of it all. This, this hymn friends is inviting you and I. It's inviting all of us in this room this morning to reflect upon what Paul is saying here.

[23 : 46] It's inviting you and I to consider the implications for you and I. How does the incarnation of Jesus, how does the resurrection of Jesus, how does the ascension or the exaltation of Jesus, how does that pervade my thinking on a daily basis?

How can you and I live in the present age with a mind knowing that there is an age to come? An age that will transcend everything I know in this present fallen age.

You see, what this is inviting us to today is to be reminded of this as we go into 2021. That nothing has changed for you and I in Christ.

If anything, we are that much closer. We are that much closer to glory. Amen? We are indeed. This hymn is designed to ground us in that reality.

The reality that we're fallen in Adam, but that Christ came to save sinners. Christ came to save sinners.

[25 : 03] And little theologians, you can be sure of that. The story, the story is that we rebelled and we attempted to kick God out of his garden.

And yet he moved towards us in grace and in judgment. Because this mystery of godliness, this one who was revealed in the flesh, ultimately would enter the garden a second time, would he not?

Only this time it wasn't the garden of Eden. It was the garden of Gethsemane. And this time, Jesus, the son of God, he was faithful unto an agonizing death on a Roman cross.

And he bore our sins in his body on the tree. Our shame, our guilt. That sin, that sin that is between you and your spouse here this morning in your marriage.

The sin that you are struggling with in your parenting, perhaps. Or kids, the sin that you are committing against your brothers and sisters. Or that you are committing against your parents. Or the sin that dwells in each and every single one of our hearts in this room.

[26 : 22] That shame that we cannot feel that we can confess to God or we can confess to someone else. That is the sin, friends.

That is the shame that he bore on the tree. He bore it as your substitute. As my substitute. And in the process, he experienced the full wrath.

The full wrath of his father. All of that. All of that. Crystal clear. Guarantee that you can trust it.

That you can bank on it. It really happened. When I read this passage, I think about the end of A Christmas Carol. After Ebenezer Scrooge has woken up.

And he asked the question, was it all too good to be true? Was it all too good to be true? Was his redemption too good to be true?

[27 : 22] Was it simply a dream? And then Scrooge says there, it's all right. It all happened. It's really true.

Right here in 1 Timothy chapter three, we have the early church essentially saying that to you and I. It all really happened. It's all really true.

Great is the mystery of godliness, Paul says. This is what God has done emphatically in history. For all of us who will hear this and believe this, friends.

It is meant to help recalibrate our hearts, our minds to this. Not just during this season of Advent and Christmas, but every single day of our lives.

So that we are not shaken. We are not rocked. But we are firmly established in the faith here and now. So that, as he says in verse 14, you and I might know how to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God.

[28 : 30] This is the third point. The life shaped by scripture. The word for household there, it's an interesting word that Paul uses here. It's the same root of a word that he used in 1 Timothy chapter one, verse four, where there he talked about, he talked about that what Timothy was to preach, what Timothy was to teach, what we are to preach and teach in the church, is the stewardship from God that is by faith.

It's the same, the word for stewardship, it's the same root here, or root of the word that he uses here for household. And what Paul is getting at is that just as the message, the message, the doctrine, the teaching is from God, as he says in chapter one, so too is the church that you and I are of God, that the church is born of the same sovereign grace that saved you and I to begin with.

The church is God's household. It's God's household. And this is amazing language, given the first century, given the ancient world. Paul is using this as a term for royalty, as a term for, of course, a familial relationship that we enjoy both with the Father and the Son, and we enjoy with one another as well.

This is truly, truly remarkable. As historian Tom Holland said in his book, Dominion, he talks about that this concept was so incredibly foreign to the ancient world.

This concept of God being father, Jesus being son, we being members of the same household of God, being family, and yet it's this concept that went out from the world and changed, turned the world upside down, the pagan world upside down.

[30 : 26] Now, this household is what you and I are called to participate in. We're called to participate in it. Now, how do we do that? The main way, the primary way we do that is what we are doing here today.

Being called out of the world to come and sit, to receive from God his means of grace, to receive his pardon for our sins, to sing his praises in response to who God is.

We are to confess our sins. We are to give of our tithes and offerings. We are to confess the faith that we have been confessing as a church for 2,000 years. We are to sit under the preaching of his word, his primary means of grace.

And then the Lord's Supper, baptism, the benediction, all of these things, God blessing us as his people again and again and again so that we are built up in holiness.

We are built up in godliness. And this is our calling as his people, is it not? Our calling is to pursue this God.

[31 : 29] Our calling is to pursue godliness. Pursue godliness. Having our minds transformed. Having our bodies set as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to him.

Having our hearts, our hearts interacting with God's truth, God's revelation in his word of who Jesus Christ is. This is what we are called to as his people.

This is ultimately, friends, what Christianity is truly about. Little theologians, know this, kids, that Christianity isn't merely a religion.

It is a religion who brings you back to your heavenly father and to your blessed big brother, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is ultimately what God was doing in revealing his son to the world so that you and I might be reconciled back to him. And you and I might be at home with him in his household.

[32 : 33] And this is the ministry, friends, that as a church we are entrusted with. We proclaim this message. We defend it. We protect it. Paul calls us the buttress or the fortress of the truth. And don't miss that. He doesn't say the fortress of a truth. He says the fortress of the truth. The truth. It's because this is to be found nowhere else except in God's household. This message to the world. Salvation has come.

This is our great confession, friends, handed down to us by our spiritual ancestors. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness.

Great indeed is our God, friends. Amen. He has provided everything that you and I need for life and godliness. Do not fear, but look to him.

[33 : 36] When on the day the great I am, the faithful and the true, the lamb who was for sinners slain, is making all things new.

Behold, our God shall live with us and be our steadfast light. And we shall e'er his people be.

All glory be to Christ. All glory be to Christ our King. All glory be to Christ. His rule and reign will ever sing.

All glory be to Christ. That is the end of the story that is already written. It is kept in heaven for you.

And that is a promise that you can trust today. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our Lord stands forever. And thanks be to him.

[34 : 37] Amen. Amen. Let's pray. God, we thank you. We thank you for this word. We thank you, Lord. In times of uncertainty, of unrest, Lord, that each and every one of us have experienced this year in particular, perhaps more so than in any other time of recent memory in our lives, Lord, we are so thankful that we are part of your household, the fortress of the truth.

We thank you for that. We thank you for the story that you have written, Lord Jesus, the story that you have acted, that you have taken upon yourself, Lord, the story that you sweep us up into and you make us your very own.

We thank you for the dogma. We thank you for the meaning of the story that we can understand what it all means. And, Lord, we thank you for the new life that we have by the power of your spirit, our union with Jesus.

We are united to him by faith and faith alone. And, Lord, you lead us on. You lead us on to that great city. All glory be to you, we pray. Amen.