

1 Timothy 3:16

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[0 : 00] In Jesus' name, Amen. So I want to speak from 1 Timothy 3 and verse 16, but what I want to do really is there, kind of spread out so actually we deal with the whole of the Bible in the next 30 minutes.

Let me read to you from 1 Timothy 3 verse 16 where Paul says, Great indeed, we confess, it's the mystery of godliness. Remember, a mystery in the Bible is something that was hidden and now has been revealed.

Speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, there's couplets here, he was manifest, he was shown in the flesh, he was vindicated by the Spirit. That should be tied together. And the second couplet is, he was seen by the angels, proclaimed amongst the nations.

And then the third couplet is, he was believed on in the world and taken up into glory. And I want to speak on the middle one. I want to talk about where it says that he was seen by angels and proclaimed amongst the nations.

G.K. Chesterton wrote a very long time ago, he said, what we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition and has settled on the organ of conviction, where it was never meant to be.

[1 : 14] He said a man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubtful of the truth, and that has been completely reversed. We're on the road, says Chesterton, to producing a race of men and women too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table.

That's exactly right. What that quote is saying is, we're so sure of ourselves, we are to believe in ourselves, aren't we? We're so sure of ourselves, but we're so unsure about the truth.

We're encouraged, aren't we, to believe in yourself. But as far as the truth is concerned, what is truth? And that's what people say, don't they? Everyone has their own truth.

There is no absolute truth. What is true for me? Well, it may not be true for you, and vice versa. And what always happens is, the spirit of the age, the spirit of the culture that we live in, begins to seep into the life of the church.

So it's not unusual, is it, that you'll go to a Bible study with some Christians, and maybe they come from good churches, and they'll say in a Bible study, when you ask them, what does this passage mean?

[2 : 22] What do you think this verse means? And they will say, well, it all depends how you look at it. It all depends on how you look at it. It's a matter of interpretation.

Yes, that verse, you may say that means that, but that is your interpretation. And I've got my interpretation, and you've got yours. Is that really the case? Now what does this text say in 1 Timothy verse 16?

It says, he, that is the Lord Jesus, was seen by the angels, proclaimed among the nations. How is Jesus to be proclaimed?

How is Jesus to be preached? How is Jesus to be taught? As you see it, as I see it, is Jesus to be proclaimed to the nations as the IPC sees it?

No, can you see it? It's as the angels saw him. He is to be preached to the nations as the angels saw him. As it's not a matter of my interpretation or yours, it's how did the angels view him.

[3 : 29] And what I want to do is, first of all, go on a whistle-stop tour of the gospel, and then I want to get a general picture from two passages, and then I want to try and proclaim it to your conscience.

So let's do a whistle-stop tour of the gospel and try and get a general picture. I hope you're not embarrassed by angels. There are some people that don't like us talking about angels. Francis Schaeffer, who founded our denomination, was always being asked to conduct university missions.

You know, five nights, where you get five nights and people bring their friends in, you are to explain the basics of the gospel to them. And when Francis Schaeffer took a mission at a university, he would always speak on the first night about angels.

Which is a very, very odd thing to do in lots of ways. And somebody said to him, that is a bit strange, isn't it? If I speak in missions, and occasionally I've done that, in five days, I've never spoken on angels at any university mission.

Well, Schaeffer said this, if you start by talking about angels, people know from the very beginning that you're not talking about morality, but you're talking about something supernatural.

[4 : 41] And I hope, as Christians, we are not embarrassed about supernatural. I hope we're not embarrassed about angels, because the gospel records are full of angels. I don't know whether you've ever noticed that, but you keep on bumping into them everywhere.

At every crucial point in the Lord Jesus' earthly career, there are angels. In fact, the word angel appears more often in the New Testament than the word love and the word sin.

The word angel appears more frequently than either of those words. R.C. Sproul said, you can no more cut the angels out of the gospel record than you can the miracles without being guilty of biblical vandalism.

They are everywhere in the gospel accounts, not like some varnish or gloss that has been sprayed on by some pious believer, but they are deeply embedded in the story. The whole route from Bethlehem to Calvary, from cradle to cross, is trafficked by angels.

At every point along the way, he is seen by the angels. So do you remember, they were there when he left heaven. The angels. Do you remember, one of the descriptions of the Lord Jesus is, he is the king of the angels.

[5 : 54] He is the one whom angels worship. Isaiah chapter 6. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, he says. And John tells us that in John 12 verse 41, it's a great verse for Jehovah's Witnesses when they come knocking on your door.

John tells us that Isaiah, when he saw the Lord in Isaiah 6, saw Jesus. He was talking about Jesus in his glory. In his pre-incarnate state.

So in the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah went into the temple, and he saw the Lord. He saw Jesus seated upon the throne, surrounded by angels.

And the angels were incessantly crying, Holy. He is holy. He is holy. He is holy. It wasn't some kind of liturgical chant, holy, holy, holy.

It was, look how holy he is. Look how holy he is. They're enthusiastic about this. He is surrounded by angels in heaven. So can you imagine? Can you imagine how shocked they must have been when the King of Angels got off his throne and entered into the womb of the Virgin Mary?

[7 : 05] Can you imagine how amazed they must have been to see the King of Angels, the King of Glory, the one who flung stars into space, become a tiny little cluster of cells, of eggs, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, no bigger than the dot on the dot of an eye?

Luke calls it, doesn't he, that holy thing. That's how Luke describes the fetus in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The creator of the ends of the earth, born of a woman, the lawgiver under the law, the creator entering into creation.

And of course, they were the ones that announced the birth to Mary and Joseph and to the shepherds. Do you remember what they said? The angel said, unto you is born this day in the city of David a teacher.

That's not what the angel said. There's not lots of people in church here, but that is what the angel said. They said, unto you is born this day an example.

No, they didn't say that. The angel said, unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour.

That's how the angels see him. And that is how he's to be preached.

[8 : 20] Of course, Jesus is a teacher. And yes, he is an example. But the way the angels look at Jesus is that he is God come to the rescue. That's why they said to Joseph in a dream, call his name Jesus.

Jehovah to the rescue. That's what his name means. Call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. And that's how the angels look at him. And they were there, weren't they, when he began his public ministry at the age of 30, the age when people were ordained as prophets and priests and kings and suddenly Jesus stepped out of the carpenter's shop into the limelight.

And do you remember how he began his public career? He began his public career in a line of sinners waiting to be baptised in the River Jordan. It's the first time you see Jesus in public lining up with sinners.

I've known this before a few times but John White when he was a medical student he missed that practical class on sexually transmitted disease. He missed the class he wasn't able to get to it so he had to go to the sexual STD clinic at night a time that students don't normally go to the clinic. As he entered the male nurse met him and there's a line of men that are lining up for treatment and he said to the male nurse he said I want to see the doctor. The nurse says to him that's what everyone wants stand in line.

[9 : 49] He says but you don't understand I'm a medical student doesn't matter you've got it the same way as everyone else stand in line. John White says in the end I managed to explain to him why I was there but he said I can still feel that sense of shame that made me balk at standing in line with men who had STDs and yet Jesus stands in line with sinners at the Jordan River.

The Holy Son of God the Holy One of God lined up with a bunch of sinners he enters into that sinful water waiting to be baptised he is identified with us he publicly identifies with us he has no sin of his own but he has made sin for us and as he takes that first step to the cross no sooner does he come out of the water than do you remember what the gospel writers tell us?

They tell us that he was driven by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan do you notice he was calling the fight on it's not Satan going after Jesus it is the triune God going after Satan Satan would have done anything to get out of it God takes the initiative and no sooner does he identify with us as the saviour of sinners he's driven out into the wilderness to engage with the enemy and Luke tells us that at the end of those 40 days and 40 nights when the devil has used up every ounce of his ammunition where he's fired every bullet at Jesus and yet Jesus remains standing the devil is forced to retreat and at that point Matthew tells us what?

He probably missed it that angels came and attended Jesus angels came and attended him and they were there weren't they in the garden of Gethsemane when the sleepy headed disciples they rubbed their eyes for tiredness and the angels in heaven they rub their eyes because they can't believe what's happening to the king and the angels and they view him prostrate in the garden on the ground you'll make a lie and the disciples they are dropping off to sleep but the angels can't believe it but the one who they worship for all eternity is now the one who is wrestling with God's will for our salvation and the account that Luke tells us you know it don't you that he sweat great drops of blood so great was his anguish so great was the stress that is upon him at the prospect of taking the wrath of God and Luke tells us this beautiful little detail that it was an angel came from heaven and strengthened him

John Stott's got this great quote he compares the death of Jesus to the death of Socrates not the footballer Socrates is in his prison cell in Athens according to Plato's account and he took his cup of hemlock at the end of his life his cup of poison and Socrates without trembling or changing colour or expression he raises the cup to his lips and very cheerfully and quietly he drains it and when his friends around the bed of Socrates break into tears he rebukes them for their absurd behaviour he urges them be quiet and be brave and it says that he died without fear sorrow or protest so says John Stott was Socrates braver than Jesus or were their cups filled with different poison and that's the point isn't it in the garden Jesus cries Father if it be possible take this cup from me and that is what

[13 : 34] Jesus is facing in the garden that's what caused him to sweat great drops of blood that is what he is facing in the garden the cup that was filled to the brim with the wrath and the anger of God against sin and Father if it's possible let there be another way let this be taken from me and an angel from heaven comes and appears to him and encourages him and strengthens him and so they walk out of the garden of Gethsemane across the Kidron Valley and they make their way towards Jerusalem and do you remember what happens Judas turns out and he goes over to Jesus and he kisses him on the cheek but it's not a kiss of affection it's a kiss of betrayal and the soldiers know that that is the man whom they must arrest and Peter who is with Jesus can't believe it and so he pulls on his sword and he cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant and do you remember what Jesus says he says don't you realise

Peter I don't need you to defend me I don't need you to get your sword out put it away because if I would call on my father he would send 12 legion of angels I'd have 12 legion of angels at my disposal I could click my fingers and 72,000 angels would turn up like that and on the first Easter

Sunday morning in Matthew 28 after Jesus is crucified dead and buried do you remember what happens who moves the stone because God sent an angel doesn't he to roll the stone away not to let Jesus out of the tomb but to let the disciples in and they say that they sitting on top of that stone when the women turn up he's not here he's risen and that's the thrust isn't it of Matthew's gospel Matthew 28 when we go through that chapter we'll see that there's one real message in Matthew 28 and that is this come and see come and see and then go and tell go and tell come and see women go and tell come and see disciples go and tell and when the women catch up with the disciples they say he's risen from the dead and they run into the tomb don't they Peter and John and they go and see and then they go and tell go and tell them what tell them what tell them what the angels have seen tell them about an empty tomb tell them about the one who's delivered up for our offences and is risen for our justification that is what the angels saw now 40 days later you're in Acts chapter 1 on the Mount of Olives and Jesus ascends doesn't he he goes up he ascends bodily to the right hand of the majesty on high and as he rises from the ground the disciples are there I can't believe it their mouths are open their eyes are at dark and two angels turn up do you remember Acts 1 9-11 it's almost as if the angels have to dig them in the ribs and say men of Galilee what are you doing standing here looking up in the heaven this same Jesus that you're seeing going up is going to come back he will come now get on with the work get on with telling others there's work to be done before he gets back and they're telling that you are to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and all the ends of the earth and the book of Acts there's three circles going out do you remember what they say when he comes back he will come back with all his holy angels on the clouds of glory and so I hope you're not one of those Christians who's embarrassed by angels he's seen by the angels at every step of the way at every crucial point now let's try to sharpen the focus let's look at two passages so let's go to 1 Peter chapter 1 it's on page 1014 1 Peter chapter 1 and it's one of those really long sentences one of those long sentences let me read the sentence to you and then

I'll give you the gist it's actually a long sentence but simple verse 10 so Peter says concerning this salvation you believed the Lord Jesus the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully they inquired about what person or time the spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories and it was revealed to them that is the people that had the spirit of Christ before Christ had come that there would be a suffering Christ and there would be a subsequent glory and it was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you and the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven things into which angels long to look it's not as complicated as it sounds what Peter is saying is what the prophets predicted the apostles announced and the angels long to look into it it's saying that the sufferings of

[19:15] Christ and the glory that would follow wasn't pointless for Christ there was a purpose to the sufferings in Jerusalem it wasn't a tragedy that should never have happened there was a purpose to it and there is glory that follows the sufferings of Christ and the prophets they looked forward to these things and the apostles have announced them but the angels they long to look into it there's a really helpful illustration at the end of verse 12 the words that Peter uses there is the same word that is used of Mary and the women when they come into the tomb so if you remember when they come to the empty tomb and they see the stone rolled away remember Jesus is not put into a grave six foot under the ground you've got to get that out of your head he is put into a tomb he is laid on a slab on a tomb it's not a western grave but it's a cave within a rock and as the women come to the tomb come to the grave they bow down and they stoop and they look in they look in they look into the ledge they look into the ledge where Jesus body should have been and they stoop and they look down and they can't see the body and that's the word

Peter uses in chapter 1 and verse 12 about the angels the angels they stoop down and they look into these things they peer they gaze at the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow the picture is of angels bending forward gazing intently and so can you see the connection between the Old Testament reading we had earlier in the passage do you remember that if you were paying attention in Exodus it's something that was at the very heart of the Old Testament religion wasn't it so do you remember you had the holy place and you had the mercy seat on top of that box of wood covered in gold and there were really really precise instructions do you remember them how to construct the lid that you were to have a cherubim and the cherubim was to be on one side of the lid

and another cherubim on the other side of the lid and their wings were to be outstretched and they were to be looking at one another they were to be facing one another gazing downwards on the mercy seat you can read it in

Exodus 25 and so what are the angels gazing at what are the angels that are facing one another on this box looking down on do you remember what are they focusing their attention on they're focusing their attention on the mercy seat and it's the place of atonement it's the place where the priest would come and sprinkle blood it's the place where a holy god would meet a sinful people and that's what the angels desire to look into that is how Christ is to be preached among the nations as the angels see him how do the angels see him the angels see him as a propitiation for our sins that is not an evangelical interpretation that is not how fundamentalists see it I'm often called that they say well you might see

Jesus' death in that way but I don't see it like that that's grotesque to talk about anger and dying and wrath you might be what you call an evangelical but I don't believe that it's butcher shop Christianity to talk about blood like that that Jesus should die on the cross that the father should punish his son how dare you that's your interpretation they say but it's not mine but the Bible says no that is the way that Jesus is to be preached in the nations and that is how the angels see him they see him as the propitiation for our sin he to rescue us from danger interposed his precious blood and that is the gospel listener there is no other gospel that is not just an interpretation I had a friend who had been part of a building project like us and there's a new church that had been built and the builder was walking them round and the new church was almost complete and one of the other builders shouted where's the cross going to go and the minister quick as a flash said in the preaching it's amazing you can go to churches in Ealing and there are crosses absolutely everywhere you can't sit in there without seeing the cross on the hymn books on the vestments on the wall on the altar they would call it everywhere it's on the shape of the building but there's no cross in the preaching and because they're embarrassed to preach the death and the blood of the Lord

Jesus Christ because it's not the way they see it it's not the way they look at Jesus they've got crosses around their neck they've got crosses all over the place but not in the preaching and how is Jesus to be proclaimed to the nations when the angels say he's to be proclaimed as the propitiation for our sins now let's look at Paul we're almost finished Ephesians 3 let's go there Ephesians chapter 3 it's on page 977 let me read you Ephesians 3 page 9778 he says and the least of the saints this grace was given to me to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to bring light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things so that through the church through us this morning the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places who are those rulers and authorities in heavenly places are the angels this was according to the eternal purpose that he has realised in Christ

[25 : 32] Jesus our Lord I preach out quite a bit and I'm often asked and well you know what question we ask wisdom preachers don't we what question do you ask wisdom preachers how many people go to your church that's the question and then do you have a student ministry as if students are on a different level of being than everyone else but that is what I'm often asked isn't it I've told you this before but I remember being at a conference where an eccentric old Welsh minister said I preach to a full church every Sunday and I know that church there's about 25 there so it's a puzzling thing to say I preach to a full church every Sunday there are the faithful few and then there are the angels the Anglican prayer book says this in the liturgy for the communion service therefore with the angels and the archangels we lord and magnify your holy name and that is literally true so when somebody says to you this week so how many go to your church you say well last

Sunday there were thousands upon thousands about 130 of us but there were thousands upon thousands of them and I want you to remember this when we gather to worship and when we can't be bothered to come on time and when we kind of roll up and we're not really bothered the angels in heaven in heaven they crowd the halls of heaven and they elbow each other out of the way because they cannot believe it when the Bible is open and the gospel is preached and they think what is going on amongst these people this is incredible they rub their eyes they can't believe it because the angels desire to look into these things and it is God's intention that through the church as we hear the gospel and we live it out in our lives and in our relationships and as we hear it and as we taste it the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the principalities and powers

sometimes we're with people and they do something that we never expected them to do they maybe lose their rag or they say something and we say to people I saw them in a new light they go through a stress or a difficulty or a sadness or maybe God is working in their lives and they have shown great strength and you never thought that they would have that and you say well I saw them in a new light and there's something like that happens when the gospel is preached and proclaimed and lived out amongst a group of Christians the angels say to one another I see God in a new light I never knew God was like this what did the angels know the angels knew didn't they the angels knew that God was holy that was their song they sang it morning noon and night holy holy holy is the Lord God almighty and they knew God is holy but until the cross of Jesus Christ until they saw him in the body of Jesus bearing our sin on the cross they never knew how holy he was if God does not spare his own son when sin is found on him by imputation do you think he will spare you that's how holy God is do you think God will spare you if he didn't spare Jesus they suddenly see how holy he is and they always knew that God was a love God was a God of love because heaven is a world of love isn't it they bask in the love of God they always knew that God was a loving God but when they see that God having loved his own who were in the world he loved them to the limit God this is love John says that we love God but that he loved us and gave himself for us to be a propitiation for our sins and so they see God is love in a whole new light and the angels knew that God was a living God and a loving God but they never saw the nuances of that they'd never seen that long suffering and the patience and the kindness and the compassion of this God but now they do through the gospel through the church through people like you and I and they always knew that God was powerful and wise and they knew that God made the world but in the cross they see the power of God and the wisdom of God like that before

Hebrews says something really lovely Hebrews 2:10 it doesn't come out in the ESV very well but it says that it was fitting it was fitting in bringing many sons to glory in bringing many sons to glory in bringing many people to know him it became him it was fitting to be the author of salvation you know what I mean by that don't you those of us who are married isn't it when your wife buys a new outfit and she puts the outfit on in front of you and she says what do you think it's a really dangerous moment how much you know what do you say you say it suits you you say it's lovely it does something for you that's the right of Hebrews we need to be very careful here but we do need to say this the cross does something for God but we're not accustomed to thinking like that but we're very accustomed aren't we to thinking what does the cross do for me but we need to remind ourselves what does the cross do for God it becomes him

[31:34] John Owen the old Puritan said this never did anything more exhibit and never will anything more redound to the glory of God than what he's done for us in Christ on the cross it becomes him and so it's no wonder that this morning as we gather and we hear God's word and we gather around the table and we sing his praise and we hear the call to worship that the angels are standing in heaven listening crowding the halls they can't believe it they're anxious to hear every bit of it because they see God as they've never seen him before in the gospel three things as we finish the first thing is this it should excite us shouldn't it it should excite us and when I was in Cardiff I told you this week and I began to preach my ministry used to take us out on open air preaching in the centre of

Cardiff on a Friday night when people were going clubbing you try different things to gather people's attention one of the things he told us is about three or four of us is somebody would point at something up above high on a building and various half drunk people would gather around to see what this person was pointing at and then the other one of us would turn around and start preaching it was ridiculous really but that is the effect that this truth should have on us the angels they point they decide to look into this the angels are excited about this the angels are pointing towards this they're bent over in heaven tonight they're desiring to look forward into it and so is it nothing to you or you who pass by here's the glorious truth Jesus didn't die for angels they don't need him to die for them the fallen angels he didn't die for

John Newton says they praised the lamb who once was slain but we can a higher strain not only say he suffered thus but that he suffered all for us it's not the message of the table he didn't die for angels and so let me ask you this morning how excited are you by Jesus secondly it ought to challenge our complacency let's face it it can become very hoham can't it communion this morning again twice a month I've forgotten we had communion this morning all that sort of thing it would be scary wouldn't it if an angel could actually manifest themselves this morning and speak to us

through the PA they would be absolutely amazed at how cold my heart is tell me the old old story
yawn yawn and familiarity can reach contempt can't it it must challenge our complacency to think of
the angels and then lastly it must steer us to testify because that really is the message of the angels
isn't it come and see

Matthew 28 come and see the empty tomb now go and tell we proclaim the Lord's death until he
comes and we go into all the world and we tell the nations and we tell them what we tell them what
the angels have seen let's pray