

1 TIMOTHY 3:14-16

(Reading: Colossians 1:15-2:5; Luke 24:13-35)

The Heart of Christ's Church!

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

In this passage we come close to the centre of this letter of Paul to Timothy.

Being at the end of chapter 3 in a book consisting of 6 chapters means we're really in the middle of it.

But we are not just at the half-way point physically.

The text before us this afternoon is also the core of this letter spiritually.

These three verses are the crux of what Paul's writing about to Timothy – and through Timothy to the Church at large.

In fact, it would be true to say this is the very heart of this letter.

Everything that has come before it or we read after it relates to this.

We will see this now in two aspects this afternoon.

Two points which draw us into why we are where we are right now.

Because you and I are now in the presence of God within the communion of the Church of Christ Jesus.

But before we move to these two aspects, which are in the verses 15 and 16, there is an introduction to them in verse 14.

Here Paul sets up some background to what he will develop.

Now, verse 14 begins with Paul's desire that he be with them soon.

This is what Paul has said in his other letters to various individuals and churches.

And it's not a casually spoken expression either.

It's certainly not like we might say, "How are you?" when the last thing we've got time for is to listen to them detailing their present physical health or financial wealth situation.

Paul is a pastor.

Whenever he can he will visit believers and congregations wherever they are.

And he does that to build them up in the faith.

He's keen they continue to grow in the Lord.

As an apostle especially called to bring the gospel to the gentiles he'll do that with every fibre of his being.

We know that from the many people he constantly prayed for and the hardships he endured.

With this ministry it is always a lot better to be there in person.

Writing from afar, or even having audio-visual link-ups, isn't quite the same.

Christianity is the truly flesh-and-blood faith, and there's nothing like being there in the flesh to bring it out!

Having said that, though, let's not think that what Paul writes is second-best.

Not only was Paul's correspondence with the believers and the churches very personal, it was also Spirit-breathed.

The apostle Peter confirms this.

In his second letter he says in chapter 3 verse 16 that Paul wrote to the churches with the wisdom God gave him.

And Peter goes on in verse 17 there about Paul, "He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters.

"His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."

And just think, congregation, it's a lot better for us that Paul is sending a letter this time!

That way the church ever since had received the Lord's guidance on how the Church ought to be run.

So what we're dealing with here is of the utmost importance.

I trust that's what we've seen already as Paul has warned about false teachers; as he testified to what the Lord has done in him; as he's addressed the importance of the right kind of public worship, speaking about the respective roles of men and women in that worship; and, in the verses of chapter 3 above, as he dealt with the two offices Christ has instituted for His Church.

None of those matters were optional extras.

They are the fundamentals to any biblically healthy church life.

And that's what verse 15 next turns our attention to.

There we note in the first aspect - **SEE WHAT YOU'RE MEANT TO BE!**

And some wonderful word-pictures we do see about what we're meant to be in verse 15.

The apostle here gets us to look at God's household, the church of the living God, and the pillar and foundation of the truth.

Three vivid descriptions of what we might think is the same thing.

And yet they are different!

Take this picture of God's household, for example.

And, in particular let's see it in the context verse 15 puts it – the context of how we believers ought to conduct themselves within it.

Simply by using the expression 'household' the family comes into the picture.

And we know how to treat family – don't we?

Indeed, because all church members belong to a family, we have to treat each other as though we were blood relatives – you know, like brothers and sisters, or relatives by marriage.

Later on in this letter Paul gives some examples of this.

In chapter 5, verses 1 and 2, he says, “Don't rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father.

“Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.”

Congregation, today many in our society have no concept of family.

They treat other people as objects, not as people.

And it all comes out of the secularism society has descended into.

That believes it's all about **me**.

No one else matters!

As Dr Peter Jensen, the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney said, this world's philosophy “is a recipe for loneliness and the path to a very lonely old age.”

But because we're in God's family we see that those around us have needs and so have to be cared for.

Especially for those in the church family we make sure they have protection, and housing and clothing and food.

We saw this in the special calling of the deacons to look after the physical needs of people.

But also there's the calling to elders to look after their spiritual needs.

As one preacher said, “A church doesn't grow by addition, but by nutrition.”

That's why without the solid preaching of God's Word a church isn't going anywhere.

It doesn't matter how many thousands it packs into its Sunday services the right teaching is fundamental.

There are too many churches today where you don't bring your Bibles anymore; too many congregations where the people in the pew are starved week after week after week.

Are you going to a church that preaches God's Word?

Is every part of the life of your congregation based on God's Word?

Do you read this Word of God every day yourself?

Then the apostle uses the word picture of “the church of the living God.”

This is not a new description.

For this is language from the Old Testament.

It shows the covenantal line between the Israel of the Old Testament and the Christian church in the New Testament.

This is brought out through the underlying mean of the word 'church'.
Because the Greek word is *ecclesia*, which means 'an assembly'.

This is how Stephen spoke of Israel in Acts 7 verse 38.
In his speech to the Sanhedrin that early deacon described how Israel was the people of God gathered together into a covenant relationship with Him.

And that's how we find the Christian Church described through all its different meetings.
For there they make up the new covenant people of God.
As 1st Peter 2 verses 9 and 10 declares, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
"Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God, once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

We know the God of Israel was the one true God.
He was the living God when compared to the pagan idols of wood and stone.
He alone could act when those foreign deities could never ever help their devotees – and certainly not save them from their sin and suffering!

The God of Israel - YAHWEH - is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, as well the One who controls all time and all peoples.
And, now, through the new covenant age of the gospel, He makes Himself known still further as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
This is what Paul declares in the next chapter of this letter as in verse 10 he says, "we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe."

This is what the Lord Himself was clear about.
In John 6 verse 57 He says, "as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me."

Then there's the third word picture in verse 15.
What we're meant to be comes to us now in a further aspect.
For now we see it as "the pillar and foundation of the truth."

The type of pillar described here would have been very clear to those believers Timothy was pasturing amongst in Ephesus.
For in that city there was the temple of Artemis.
Or, to use its Latin name, the temple of Diana.

This was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
This was the huge edifice which held the great annual pagan festival to which people from all over the empire came.

But what really stood out about this massive structure were the 127 pillars which held up its roof.

Each of those 127 pillars was the gift of a king.

Now, every one of those pillars was made of marble.

Some were even studded with jewels and overlaid with gold.

The connection would have been instant for the believers then.

As each of those pillars was there to beautify the temple so it's our calling to show the glories of the truth of God.

Furthermore, pillars hold up the roof.

And so the Church must be held up against all the attacks against the truth.

They were attacks the Ephesian Christians were even then experiencing.

Chapter 1 began with the words exhorting Timothy to deal with those teaching false doctrines.

The use of the word 'foundation' supports what should really matter in the Church of Christ.

Foundations are what hold a building up, and so it is that the Church can only be effective if it's based on God's Word.

This is what was revealed to those two men on the road to Emmaus.

The Scriptures were opened to them – the Scriptures through which it's clear it is all about God and what He's doing in His Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Whenever a church preaches another gospel than this it cannot stand.

Then its end will be as the great Temple of Diana now is.

All that remains there is a bog with an old stump of a pillar sticking out of the mud.

Having come to this point, though, the apostle is inspired to raise another of his famous doxologies of praise to His Lord!

Verse 16 brings out a crescendo of acclamation.

In the words of a second aspect to our text this afternoon, **BEHOLD WHO CHRIST TRULY IS!**

Again the pagan background is important to note here.

For, in the light of all those mystery religions so popular throughout the empire, here is the greatest mystery of all!

I mean, when every other belief system says that it's all about what you can do how amazing is the faith which says it can only be about what God has done!

Interestingly, when Paul uses the term 'mystery' he doesn't mean it as something obscure or difficult to understand, except to a few enlightened ones.

He means by it the body of revealed truth that make up the gospel message – the fundamentals of the faith he’s about to break out in song about here!

He’s already written about this same thing to the Colossians.

As we read there in verse 26 of chapter 1, this is the mystery that’s been hidden for ages and generations but is now revealed to us because Christ has come!

This is what Paul described in verse 9 before our text as ‘the deep truths of the faith.’

And it’s these vital facts which truly put us in our place.

For the more we know God, the better we’ll be able to understand His love and His attributes.

Now verse 16 follows with six statements about the Lord.

Six affirmations which make up three contrasting couplets.

And they follow a general line chronologically from Christ’s incarnation to His glorification.

The first of these says “He appeared in a body.”

We are told there Christ was truly human.

John 1 verse 14 states the same as it says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

“We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

By God becoming fully human He is able to stand in our place.

All of which we brought upon ourselves through the fall into sin He can take now in our place.

In speaking of Jesus being ‘vindicated by the Spirit’ we see that His doing and dying was justified through His resurrection.

While His death was a complete miscarriage of justice, it had been brought about by the sovereign plan of God.

That mean He died as a criminal under law and alongside other criminals.

But in His victory over death He was shown to be what He had always said He was – the truly righteous servant of God who gave Himself for His people.

And it’s this which the Holy Spirit did through the resurrection.

Being ‘seen by angels’ confirms the heavenly witness to His work.

They were there looking on before and after the resurrection.

They are as much affected by what He did as we are.

Paul makes further reference to this in verse 21 of chapter 5 in this same letter.

There we see how much of a vested interest the angels have in what’s happening as Timothy is given his solemn charge “in the sight of God and Christ Jesus **and the elect angels.**”

Then it is declared that Christ “was preached among the nation.”

We might well wonder about this since this was only some thirty years after the death and resurrection of the Lord.

Surely the gospel hadn't yet gone out to all the world?

But this is specifically referring to what happened on the Day of Pentecost.

For there the Jewish diaspora from all the nations of the then known world were present.

There they heard Peter preaching about Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven, where He now reigns.

It was that gospel which was proclaimed everywhere the disciples and followers of Jesus went.

And hasn't Christianity since then truly become a world religion?

It was through the preaching of the Word that Jesus Christ “was believed on in the world”, as verse 16 continues.

There have been many coming to faith – and they still are!

And one day we will join with all of them before this God-man.

Then the greatest congregation of all time will bow before the throne.

This is the way verse 16 concludes.

For the Lord “was taken up in glory.”

Jesus ascended into heaven as part of His exaltation.

His lowly earthly body was replaced by a heavenly and exalted one.

This is the ‘glory’ spoken of here.

The glory which is the absolute splendour of God's presence which he obtained as the reward for His earthly obedience.

Jesus Christ spoke of this just before His arrest.

In John 17 verse 5 He prayed, “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”

Now He rules from heaven until the point of His return to earth.

A coming which will be in complete contrast to the first time He came to us.

For then no one will miss Him – and yet so many will have missed Him – through their unbelief!

Then all will bow before Him – every creature in heaven and on earth.

In the words of Philippians 2 verse 11, every tongue will confess Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father.

But, dear friend, are you doing that right now?

When you consider all these qualities for Him who was perfectly faithful, how are you shaping up?

Here we come back to what Paul said in verse 15.

This is about the way we ought to conduct ourselves in God's household.

And how are **you** doing in that?

Congregation, we are not those who should be surprised at Christ's return.

In fact, we should be those who have been so busy living out what we as part of Christ's Body that His coming again is the most natural and expected thing!

You see, the heart of Christ's Church is the heart of Christ Himself.

It's there where His Word and Spirit is.

It's here where the church of the living God is.

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Lord Jesus, may we be those who are constantly expecting You to come at any time on those clouds of glory!

And may we be those expecting You because we'll be found busy working for You then.

Then Your Word and Spirit are at the heart of what Your Church is.

Lord, You wondered once whether there would be any faith on earth when You returned.

May that never be.

Instead, we claim Your promise that You will always keep a remnant faithful to You.

In Your ruling Name alone, we pray, Amen.