

# 1 Timothy 3:14-16 - Fully Human & Fully Divine

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 25 December 2025

Preacher: Steve Palframan

[0:00] Now, one of the things I'm really thankful for this year is the brilliant people who volunteer and work in our church. We have a small staff team as well. And Jen here is a part of our staff team.

We're very grateful to you. God for you, Jen. And she's going to read for us at last minute notice. Thanks, Jen. OK, reading from verse 14.

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing to you with these instructions so that if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is a church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great.

He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on, sorry, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

Amen. Thanks, Jen. Now, I know I'm going to leave it on that slide. Don't worry. I've not forgotten. It's all right.

[1:16] So you can keep your Bible open, but I've also kept it up on the slide behind. So we're just going to have a look together at that verse 16. I don't intend to keep us for very long, but I want us just to think about that very first line in that sentence there.

He appeared in the flesh. He appeared in the flesh. My hope this morning, and my expectations are fairly limited this morning, but my hope is that we can pause together and see amidst everything else that's going on this morning, just how significant the events are that we are celebrating together today.

We are celebrating the arrival of the Lord Jesus in flesh. He appeared in the flesh. It's about the incarnations, isn't it? God the Son, the eternal Son of God, taking on himself human flesh and being born as a baby.

And here's the thing that we've got to try and keep in our minds, that at the same time, in the same person, God the Son in human flesh is a weak, small, helpless, totally dependent baby, lying in a manger and wrapped in cloths, whilst at the same time, that same person, according to his divine nature, is sustaining the very world into which he has come, putting the air in the lungs of his mother, holding the stars in space above the stable.

It's an extraordinary thought, isn't it, to try and hold those two things together. Those two things are true of the same person at the same time. One person, two natures.

[2:58] Now, we're going to hear today, aren't we, all sorts of extraordinary things. Yeah, you're sitting around a dinner table, and people will tell you extraordinary things. Some of them will not be very important.

They will have read them from the cracker that they opened, right? There'll be some pointless facts about space and how big it is, or how deep the ocean is, or how many times it's snowed on Christmas Day in London.

Those are extraordinary things, but they are totally irrelevant. They don't matter at all. But I want to suggest to you that this extraordinary truth, that one person, the person of the Son, has a fully human nature and a fully divine nature at the same time, is not extraordinary but irrelevant, but is vital and essential.

I want to suggest to us this morning that it is impossible for us to live properly and know God truly unless we grasp this idea that we've been talking about.

And that's what Paul introduces in this statement in 1 Timothy 3 verse 16. He appeared in the flesh. And if you have a look just a bit further up, at the bit that Jen read for us in verses 14 to 15, you will see how important it is.

[ 4 : 12 ] So Paul here is trying to teach the church. So 1 Timothy, very briefly, written to a guy called Timothy, by a guy called Paul, and Timothy is working in a church in Ephesus.

And he is writing to them to tell them how they should run their church life. If you look, particularly here, his concern is how people ought to conduct themselves in the life of the church, the church which is called God's household, the church which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth, is how he puts it.

In other words, what he's saying, verse 16, these are essential truths for church life, the church which is the pillar of the truth, and this is the truth about how you should live, he appeared in the flesh.

He says the same thing as he introduces it in verse 16 as well. If you just walk through verse 16 with me, he starts by saying, beyond all question, or most certainly, or undeniably, it's the only time that word appears in the New Testament.

It's like a highlighter pen that Paul's using, an underlining. Listen, what comes next? Beyond all question, without a shadow of a doubt, this is centrally important.

[ 5 : 23 ] The mystery, which is a reference to the gospel, the message about Jesus Christ, which is now being revealed, the mystery of the gospel is the source of true godliness. In other words, Christian living, godliness, being good, is a fruit, not a root.

Yeah? In other words, you get the gospel right, he appeared in the flesh, and you'll get living right. Godliness doesn't come before the gospel.

People get this wrong all the time, right? So listen up. Right? The good living comes from the change that God has made in our hearts through the gospel.

You don't change your life so that you're acceptable to God. God in the gospel makes you acceptable to him and changes your life by the spirit. Godliness is the fruit of God saving us, not the root of us saving ourselves.

And this mystery of the gospel is first, he, God, appeared in the flesh. Herman Bavinck, who you might not have heard of, but I'd like to think of him as a friend of mine.

[ 6 : 29 ] He's been dead for over 100 years, but he was a Dutch theologian. And he says this is the central point of all Christian truth. All Christian doctrine is either preparing for this or springing from this, he says.

Which means that today, Christmas Day, we are celebrating something that is centrally important. God appearing in flesh. It's a great day. And I want to show you two reasons why it's so important. And the first one is, he appeared. Right? Let's think about those first two words. He appeared. God appeared. Now I'm going to need a bit of help to think about this first point. And I've got a present. God, I need someone to help me with and help me open.

Jamie, you're sat in the front row, so you're like very convenient to open if you'd like. Do you want to help me? But I want you to not open it straight away. I want you to try and work out what it is first. Because this is what you do when you get a present, right? You've got to try and work out what it is. Take it from me. There you go. Have a shake. What do you think? Maybe smell it.

[ 7 : 35 ] Glitter. I think it's glitter maybe, yeah? That would be heavy glitter, I think. Shake it. Smell it maybe. A little smell. You can ask your dad for wisdom if you want.

Yeah, that's a ridiculous thought, isn't it? Why would I do that? So you see, you can shake it again, shake it again, see with you. It's very difficult, isn't it, with a present, to know exactly what it is.

Lindsay, do you want to have a go? I know it is. I know it is. I know it is. Now, Lindsay might be about to spoil my whole illustration. Should we let her try?

Go on. I think she knows. Shake it, see what you think.

Oh, no, it's not. See, it's too heavy for Harry Bowie, Star Mix. Yeah. There you go, James. Well, good try, though. It is impossible to tell what is in there without doing what?

[ 8 : 39 ] Open it. So why don't you open it? there you go what is it chocolate there you go that's right you can have that you can go and have a sit down you can share them out later if you want to play the after eight mint game where you slide it down your face and get it in your mouth you can play that with jamie later if you'd like to right here's the point without without opening it we can have a guess can't we lindsay but we can't know for sure what it is this is what's going on at christmas god is appearing he's showing himself you know without him doing that we would not really know who god is or what god is like and in the incarnation god without for a moment shedding any of his divinity is in the person of the son taking on flesh that you and i can see him so that we can know

him god in flesh is god revealed you know without the incarnation god is if you like shrouded covered over in mystery he is wrapped up he's like jamie with the unopened present he is unknowable distant far off we can have a guess what he's like but we might guess haribo instead of after eight minutes lindsay you've helped me out greatly this morning that's brilliant jesus said to his disciples he said anyone who has seen me has seen the father in heaven the apostle john writing years later said this the life appeared god appeared and we've seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the father and has appeared to us i guess for a couple of ways you can say you know something can you so if we say that god has revealed himself so that we can know him there could be a couple of ways of saying i know something couldn't there there could be one way of saying it which is you know like i know quantum physics i don't i'm just imagining i know quantum physics or i know what 3799 times 1245 is you know it could be i know something because i've got a really big brain right but there's another way of saying something isn't it you could say i know my mom or i know my teacher or i know my friend or i know my sister or i know my brother and then you're not claiming to have a big brain are you what you're claiming is to have a relationship with somebody the christian claim to know god because he has arrived in the person of the son is the claim to have a relationship with him it's not to have a big brain that we've worked god out it's the news that god has appeared so that we might know him we know god not because we researched god but because he revealed himself to us he arrived in the person of the son maybe you're not a christian this morning you don't really go to church very often it's great that you're here this we're so pleased that you're with us this morning this is the claim we don't claim to be any better than you we don't claim to be any more intelligent than you what we're claiming is that god in his kindness in the person of the son has made himself known to us that we might know him ultimately that he might die in our place to forgive us of our sin that we might be in a relationship with him a holy god with unholy people like us through the person of the son god has appeared he's unwrapped himself clothed himself in flesh so that we could know him that's the first thing he appeared second thing he appeared in the flesh now i need some help with this as well i need someone who might be able to blow a whistle for me so uh what's your how's your confidence levels lindsey you still up still up for something like

this anyone else up for this do you want to have a go you want to have a go you can come do you want to bring your mom or dad with you come on bring your dad with bring your dad with you come on come on here we go you look very smart this morning by the way i'm very impressed right so this is a whistle have you ever seen a whistle like this before so this is a it's called a shepherd's whistle right and so i want you to have a go can you make a noise with it you want to have a go have a go and if you can't do it see whether your dad can have a game with it quite difficult swing it around to your room that would make a noise so you are supposed to blow through it that's how you make a noise with it yeah yeah yeah oh there you see that's a latte can your dad make a noise with it i'm gonna sleep okay i'll tell you what sit down we'll have a look at it and see where you can do it go but well done we'll give him a little clap here we do good well done for trying that's great okay keep stretching your imaginations you're there what on earth has this got to do with it right listen jesus arrives in the flesh to show you that something is possible that you otherwise would have thought impossible you see you look at a whistle like this and you think how does that make a noise and unless someone shows you how to do it you are not able to do it because this is a the kind of thing that you need to learn someone needs to show you that it is possible for you to be able to do it right you put it in there right and it makes a whistle like that so you need to show don't please don't clap me for that jesus arrives in human flesh to show us that is possible to live a life that pleases god that's the whole point in this section right so paul is writing to timothy to tell the church how they should live their lives then well how can i live for them my flesh is weak i am a weak person i keep stumbling and falling and if you're a christian this morning you know that don't you you're the story of this year is the story of struggling to live a christian life just like we've struggled in years before but jesus arriving in human flesh reveals to us that it is possible for human flesh to please god and notice how how is that possible you're told in the next sentence jesus was vindicated by the spirit it's harder to understand that line but the point is that god the son in human flesh pleases god in the strength of the spirit so that the flesh of the son is ruled by the spirit of god vindicated by him ultimately in his resurrection but over and over so that the incarnation jesus shows us the way to live he shows us that it is possible in this world in these bodies to live a life that pleases him that is for his glory it follows his way and we can't do it in our strength we need the strength of the spirit we

need god's strength so perhaps life is particularly difficult for you this morning maybe particularly hard at christmas to think how can i go on how can i go on living for god and his glory how can i face all that's coming my way in 2026 well the incarnation says no you can live for god in this world in this flesh because you can live by the spirit just like the son did he did it for christ and he can do it for

you it's why the incarnation is so important for us as christians it's why it's the foundation not only of our salvation but also of our sanctification our growth in godliness and christlikeness it's why it is beyond all question the mystery from which all true godliness springs that jesus god the eternal son has revealed god to us and has shown us how to follow god's way how to live for him let me pray and then we'll sing together in christ alone heavenly father thank you that you have shown us what you're like by appearing in the person of the son taking on human flesh that we might know you and thank you that because of his arrival we can see not only that we can know you but that we can also live for you that we can live lives that please you and honor you as we live in the power of the spirit please help us today as we celebrate to rejoice in these great truths that you have done this for us in jesus name amen amen