

Heavenly Realities Revealed on Earth

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- [0 : 0 0] you maybe watched it on TV or on the internet, the coronation of King Charles III of the United Kingdom in Westminster Abbey.
- And if you watched that, it was a long affair and it had so much glitz and tradition and so much symbolism and it was steeped in centuries of tradition.
- In fact, there's a picture, I don't know if we have it, no? Okay. Well, if you watched it, you'll know what I'm talking about.
- There was a chair that he sat on, this old wooden chair. And I looked at the coronation and I thought, well, that's a bit of a lousy piece of furniture. You would think they would come up with something better than that for him to sit on.
- But then I looked it up and the chair that he sat on was the chair that so many English kings before him had been coronated on right as far back as 1300 AD.
- [1 : 0 2] The chair was made by Edward I, if you know who that is. And so many of the kings that we know of, even like Henry VIII, remember him with all his wives?
- They all sat on that same chair. Yeah, this coronation ceremony had so much in it and so much history and so much tradition. And the thing about this coronation that happened is that so many people who had never been able to see a coronation in their lives before managed and were able to see this on the internet.
- And it was only the second coronation that had been widely televised.
- The first, of course, was his mother, Queen Elizabeth, in 1953. That was the first time a coronation had been broadcast to the general public. But for everyone before, for hundreds of years, for centuries, and all the kings and queens before, the general public were never able to see what was going on at a coronation ceremony.
- Only a select few guests and royalty were there and could see it. The best the general public could see were glimpses of it. They would be on the outside of a place like Westminster Abbey.
- [2 : 2 4] They would be crowded on the outside and they would maybe see the king arriving in his carriage and they would catch a glimpse of it. I saw the king. I saw the king.
- And then he would go in to the abbey and they would wait. And they would know that something's going on in there, but they wouldn't quite know what. And then he would come out and they would catch another glimpse of him, maybe with his crown on. I saw the king.
- And so the general public got these glimpses from outside, but they never saw what was going on inside. Well, you know, for most of the earth's history, that's how heaven was to humanity.
- The great goings-on of the spiritual forces that control our world were beyond our view. And we only ever caught glimpses of them.
- We only ever caught glimpses of what was going on in the heavenlies, but never understanding the full picture. But all that changed when Jesus Christ came to earth.

[3 : 32] You see, at his coming, many things happened, but one of the key things about Jesus Christ coming from heaven to earth is that the business of heaven was broadcast to the general public of earth.

And that is the point of this little poem that Paul quotes in 1 Timothy. I invite you to open your Bible to 1 Timothy 3, and look at this interesting little poem that he quotes.

It was probably a hymn in the ancient church, and he quotes this well-known piece of this hymn, this poem, that really is about the business of heaven being broadcast to earth.

1 Timothy 3, 16. He says, Most certainly the mystery of godliness is great. That's how he starts. That's how he introduces this poem. Mystery in the Bible means something that had previously been hidden, but now made known.

And he says that this is the mystery of godliness. In other words, it's a mystery that once we know it, it's the business of heaven that once we realize what's going on, it changes our lives.

[4 : 40] The mystery of godliness. And what we see in this little poem is that it talks about the revelation and the coronation of the king of heaven.

Let's read it. Verse 16. He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, and taken up in glory.

You see how that poem culminates in the ascension. This little coronation poem culminates in the ascension of Jesus Christ, taken up into glory.

And what I love about this is that it moves constantly the focus between what's happening on earth and what's happening in heaven. What's happening on earth and what's happening in heaven, showing how with the coming of Jesus Christ down to earth and his ascension up to heaven, the two realms of heaven and earth, which had previously been so separate, have now been connected in the person of Jesus Christ.

And that's why the ascension of Jesus is so important, because it, in a very real way, connects humans with heaven. And we're going to consider this poem, therefore, this ascension day, these six lines.

[6 : 02] That's all we're going to consider tonight. And we're going to consider them in three parts. I think they're three couplets with three separate themes.

And so let's look at them in three parts. Firstly, well, I'll tell you the summaries of them, because we don't have it up behind me. So you can essentially summarize this poem in three parts.

Firstly, the king is revealed in the first two lines. Secondly, the king is proclaimed in the next two, and then the king is received in the last two. So firstly, the king is revealed.

The first two lines. He was manifested in the flesh and vindicated in the spirit or by the spirit. And the king is revealed. Now, before the age of photography, before photos could be made of kings, the general members of the public didn't really know what their kings and queens looked like.

They'd never seen them close up. Only a few select people had. And so they wouldn't be able to recognize them just on the street if they were wearing normal clothes. Of course, if they were in their royal robes, they could recognize them.

[7 : 15] But if the king, back in the day, put on street clothes and he went for a walk in the street, the average person wouldn't have known it was the king. They wouldn't be able to spot him.

Well, you know, that's what happened when the Son of God came to earth. Nobody could recognize him at first. He looked ordinary, like any other human being.

Well, I say nobody could recognize him, but the spiritual beings recognized him. They knew who he was right from the beginning. The demons and the angels knew who he was, but the humans didn't.

He was on earth, but he wasn't recognized by the inhabitants of earth. But even the demons and the angels who knew who he was, they didn't quite know what he was doing here.

They didn't know why, as line one says, he was manifested in the flesh. It was a big mystery. Why is the Son of God on earth? Why is he in the flesh?

[8 : 16] Why is he a human being? You see, when he came to earth, the enemies of God, and there are many, there is a whole completely foreign to us realm of spiritual beings, and there are many evil spiritual beings, enemies of God, Satan and demons, and when the Son of God came into fragile flesh, they saw this as the perfect opportunity to kill him.

The arch enemy of the forces of evil come now into their turf on earth. This was their ground, and now he's come here, so they saw this as the perfect opportunity to take out the Son of God, and that's why they influenced the Jewish leaders and the Romans and Judas to betray Jesus and to conspire together to crucify him, and when he was on that cross, you can imagine they were having a party.

They had succeeded, or at least they thought they had. Of course, we read on, and we realize that they didn't realize that that was the plan all along, right?

For Jesus to die. That was actually central to the mission that he came to earth to fulfill. But only at the second line in the poem did it make sense to them when he was vindicated by the Spirit.

When Jesus was vindicated by the Spirit. That is talking about his resurrection. When the Spirit of God infused that dead body with new life, and he stood up and he walked out of that tomb, and then everybody looking on suddenly clicked, and it made sense to them that the secret mission that he had come to earth to fulfill, the mystery, in that moment, when he walked out of that tomb, was declassified.

[10 : 18] And now, it was a mission that everybody could know about because he had accomplished it. You see, the reason the Son of God was manifested in the flesh was to infiltrate the very territory held by the enemy, and to strike a killing blow at the source of the enemy's power over humanity.

Because those spiritual forces of evil headed by the arch rival of God, Satan, have great power over humanity, and their greatest weapons against us are sin and death.

And so, Jesus came on that secret mission manifested in the flesh to strike a killing blow at those things, sin and death, by dying as a human for human sin, and then rising to conquer human death.

And it was the resurrection, the Spirit of God vindicating him, making a public declaration that his mission is now accomplished. And by the time that happened, by the time his enemies realized what was going on, it was too late.

And that is actually what is going on in the Gospel. We read the Gospels, we read of Jesus coming to earth, we read of him interacting with demons, and we go to the Old Testament, we read about all this preparation for him coming, and even that tells us, okay, this is more than what it seems to be.

[11 : 51] Something big is going on here. And that's what's going on in the Gospel, the Gospel is actually much bigger than we think, because it is the climax of the ancient cosmic conflict between good and evil in our universe.

The Gospel is not just about you and your personal salvation, it's about world-changing and heaven-changing events. And that is why Paul here calls it a great mystery.

Look at verse 16 again, most certainly the mystery of godliness is great. You know the word, the Greek word that he uses there for great is mega.

Mega. This is a mega thing. It's not just an expensive ice cream. He's talking about something, and it's the biggest word he can use to describe that the events of what happened when Jesus came to earth had shockwaves that spread out throughout history.

Eternity past and eternity future. The Gospel is much bigger than we think. That's what we get from the first two lines of this poem. But that's also why it's something that must be proclaimed, the next two lines of the poem.

[13 : 05] Let's read it. What happened after this? Well, he was seen by angels and he was preached among the nations. Seen by angels and preached among the nations.

Now, when a country wins a war or when a king wins a great victory on the battlefield, it is something that must be proclaimed back in that country, back in those cities, right?

It's news that has to be proclaimed. People need to know about this. You can remember, think back to the scenes at the end of World War II. Obviously, we weren't there but we've got recordings of it and it was a triumphal moment when that news was made known, when it was proclaimed that the Allies had beaten Germany, they had won the war and people just came out into the streets and danced and celebrated.

Well, the victory of the King of Heaven over the forces of evil that have enslaved humanity for millennia was news that now needed to be proclaimed.

But what's really interesting is that it needed to be proclaimed in the heavenly realms as much as in the earthly realm. And that's why it starts here, the next two lines, in that he was first seen by angels.

[14 : 28] The angels first needed to realize what was going on after his resurrection before we did. It was big news in heaven way before it was big news on earth.

In fact, there's this very strange verse in 1 Peter. You may have come across it before and it always makes me scratch up my head when I read it. 1 Peter 3, 18-19.

Some really strange things going on here. But I want to read it again because it has a bearing on what we're reading here. It says, there's Peter describing what happened when Jesus came to earth and what he achieved.

And he says, For Christ also suffered for sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.

Very similar to what Paul's saying here. He was manifested in the flesh and vindicated in the Spirit. The next verse is crazy. Peter says, In which, this is verse 19 of 1 Peter 3, In which he also went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison.

[15 : 37] What? Now, we're not quite sure what he means there. Come back when we actually do a sermon series in 1 Peter and we'll dive into it. But it seems, whatever it means, it seems that after the resurrection of Jesus, one of the first things he did was to proclaim his victory and rule to the fallen angels.

You see, there's much more going on than what we just saw on earth. So, the heavenly realms needed to be made aware of what had happened even before the earthly realms did.

Also, think about this. After Jesus' resurrection, according to the Gospels, who were the first witnesses of the resurrection? who were the first to see that Christ had won?

It wasn't the woman. They were the first human witnesses. It was the angels who told them. He was seen by angels.

They had just learned the truth that they then made known to the woman that before, according to 1 Peter 1.12, they had, angels had longed to look in for, but had never known what was going on until the Spirit vindicated Christ and he rose from that tomb and then it all made sense and that needed to be proclaimed.

[17 : 00] That victory was first proclaimed in the heavenly realms so that the inhabitants of that realm, both good and evil, knew who was now in charge. But the same is now true of the earthly realm.

The realities of heaven must be made known on earth, which is the fourth line in the poem, preached among the nations.

Because just as the inhabitants of heaven needed to know who's now in charge, so do the inhabitants of earth now need to know who's in charge, right? And it's our job to tell them.

That's the job of the church as the pillar and foundation of the truth as we saw on Sunday. It's our job to tell the inhabitants on earth these great realities of heaven that have taken place.

The job of the king's people on earth to make the reality of his rule known on earth. And that is why the poem ends in the last two lines with how this king is received when he is made known.

[18 : 14] how this king is received both in heaven and on earth. And so I'm going to read those last two lines as we look at the king received. He was believed on in the world and taken up in glory.

Believed on in the world and taken up in glory. An important part of any coronation of a king is for the king's subject to receive him as their king and to swear fealty to him.

Often a king who had just taken over a new territory would have the old kings of those territories come and bow before him and kiss his ring or swear fealty to him. They had to receive him and it had to be a visible thing that people received him as their king.

And here in the poem it ends with both heaven and earth receiving him as their king. On earth a person receives the king through faith.

The fifth line in the poem believed on in the world. Through faith through belief but not just believing that Jesus existed and that he died for you and that your sins are forgiven.

[19 : 28] To many that's kind of the extent of their belief but real faith is believing that he is truly the king of heaven and earth. And that it's not just religious mumbo jumbo it's real.

He is the real king of heaven and earth and he is coming back and every knee will bow and every tongue confess. And it's confessing your past rebellion against his rule and it's being baptized into his name and it's living as one of his people his subjects every day.

That is life changing when you have true faith in who Jesus truly is. And the reason that people need to receive him as their king on earth is because he's already been received as king in heaven.

The last line of the poem he has been taken up in glory. And that's what the ascension was. Forty days after his resurrection the ascension was the return of the king to heaven but now in human flesh.

Think about that. On that day the inhabitants of heaven for the first time received a human as their king. A human is the king of heaven and the king of earth.

[20 : 59] imagine that coronation. Hey? I mean think of King Charles III's coronation if you watched it.

All the pomp and the pageantry. The British can really put on a good show can't they? All the soldiers dressed in their scarlet and their busbies and marching in perfect order and the brass bands and coming down the what's called the Paul Mall towards Westminster and the pageantry and the ceremony and the music and the choirs and all the gold and the jewels and the pomp and pageantry of King Charles' coronation and yet he is a frail and fallen human in a broken world.

Imagine the heavenly pageantry and the glory and the music of millions upon millions of heavenly beings that took place when the human king of heaven and earth was received by his subjects.

That is the mystery of godliness. When these heavenly realities become realities of our daily lives that is when we change.

When we go out of here and we see the world in a new way because of what has happened in heaven and when Jesus becomes as glorious in our daily lives as he is right now in heaven then we will serve him with all we have and we will worship and proclaim him with all we are as we await his return to earth.

[22 : 51] Let's pray. Oh Lord Jesus we are blown away that we can even talk to you.

The king of heaven and earth to whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess. We thank you that through faith we can be your subjects and we can wait for your return.

Oh Lord we pray that you would help us to believe this great mystery that has now been revealed. These realities of heaven that they would be real for us Lord that they would not just be treated like fairy tales because they are not.

they are true. You have rolled back the curtain and you have shown us what is really happening in the heavenly realms and we pray Lord that as we leave this place you would help us to live in light of these great realities and to make these realities known in our daily lives and in our world as we live according to them and talk about them to others.

We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.