

Easter Explanations: Highway to Heaven

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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1 Timothy 3:16 *Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.*

In Christianity, there are things the Bible calls **“the mysteries of the faith”** (1 Timothy 3:9). This month we have been exploring some of these in the light of Christ’s resurrection. We began on Easter with the mystery of history or **“the mystery of Christ”** (Ephesians 3:4) that is God’s plan throughout human history. Next we considered **“the mystery of God’s will”**...God’s purpose for each of us (Ephesians 1:9) and how we are to live. Last week, we explored **“the mystery of Christ in you, the hope of glory”** (Colossians 1:27) and how we bring God glory. Today, we learn about God’s grace – or **“the mystery of godliness”**. Godliness. Beyond human understanding, is our faith that God came into our world in Christ so that we could come into God’s world...not that we become gods, but that we become godly.

The above verse was part of a hymn in the Early Church that predates the Apostles’ Creed by a century. Part of the reason they sang their faith was that music conveys more than just words... it conveys conviction and passion and wonder. We haven’t a clue about how the tune went, but with a brevity of words - this hymn of **“the mystery of godliness”** touches upon: the Humanity of Christ, the Resurrection of Christ, the Divinity of Christ, the Good News of Christ, the Acceptance of Christ, and the Ascension of Christ. All are truths beyond our understanding, yet we know to be true by faith.

The **“mystery of godliness”** is all about God’s grace...what God has done through Christ and what God does now through Christians. Grace is the heart of our faith and the heart of our relationship to God. Grace is a multi-faceted diamond. Grace is "God giving me what I need, not what I deserve." Justice is when God gives me what we deserve. Mercy is when God doesn't give us what we do deserve. Grace is when God gives us what we don't deserve. Grace is more than absolution, grace is blessing. God not only takes care of our past, God gives us a future. Let us consider several truths Christians know regarding God’s grace.

G - GOD'S GIFT TO ME.

Romans 3:23-24 *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

Grace is a free gift. There is not anything you can do to save yourself. You just accept God's free gift of grace. No one enters heaven based on what they do. We enter heaven based on what has already been done for us by Jesus Christ. God judges the heart – and when Christ is in your heart, God knows to whom you belong.

R - RECEIVE BY FAITH

Ephesians 2:8-9 *"For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not of works so that no one can boast."*

God's gift is received by faith. If I say, "Here's this gift for you. Come and get it." It will just sit there unless you come and receive it. You have to have faith that I'm going to give it to you. God says because salvation is a gift, you cannot brag about it. If you could work your way to heaven, do you realize we would all be trying to "one up" each other with great stories of what great people we were on earth. God says, "It's a grace gift...accept it and be grateful for it."

A - AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE

Romans 10:13 *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

God says grace is available to anybody who opens up their heart in faith. There are no quotas in heaven. It doesn't say only really good people will be saved if they call on the name of the Lord or really religious people or really smart people. It says everybody. Anybody who calls on the name of the Lord, who has faith in the grace of God, will be saved. The sad thing is that even though many people know that God offers His grace, His unconditional gift to us, they still try to work their way to heaven. They think that something in their lives is making them good enough. Listen up: Heaven is perfect and we are not...we all fall short...and only God can do something about it...and God has.

C - GRACE COMES THROUGH CHRIST.

John 1:17 *"From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."*

Why through Jesus Christ? Why not Buddha or somebody else? Because Jesus Christ paid the price for your reconciliation to God...for your admission to heaven...for your salvation. Nobody else has done that one. On the cross, Jesus Christ paid the price. Grace is free, but it is not cheap. It cost Jesus Christ his life. Another acronym for GRACE that I find helpful is: **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**. **Galatians 2:21** (Living Bible) *"Don't treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if we could be saved by keeping the law, (by doing good) then there was no need for Christ to die."* If you could be saved on your own merits, the cross was a waste. If you could have gotten to heaven without any help from God, Jesus wouldn't have come and died on the cross for you. But there was no other way. So it is a gift by and of God's grace to us...that we receive by faith. Grace is all that God does for me because of what Jesus Christ did for me – and does for me.

E - EXTENDED THROUGHOUT ETERNITY

Romans 6:23 *"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

The Bible says the free gift of God is eternal life. The Bible tells us that eternal life – or heaven is: 1) A place of reunion where we are reunited with other loved ones who have accepted the grace of God; 2) A place of reward where we are rewarded for the character that we developed and the way we served other people here on earth; 3) A place of release where we are free from all pain, suffering, sadness, grief, depression, loneliness, etc.; and 4) A place of re-creation where God has meaning and purposeful activity that bring life as God intended it to be. It is a place that can only be described as paradise...and it is a gift that only God can offer....and does in Christ Jesus.

Grace changed my life. At a time in my life that I did not love myself, a small group from a church listened and loved me...and showed me God's grace. I did not understand it fully...then or now...but I received it and I have lived in it. After 40 years it remains a mystery to me that I remain in awe of... and grateful for. My prayer is that each of you would receive God's grace through faith in Christ.