

## Mission: Proclaimed among the Nations

Jonathan K. Dodson | Timothy 3:16 | January 17, 2020

This is our final message in the vision series, where we've been considering the near and far side of three essentials of Christian faith: Church, Christ, and today Mission. We'll take the remaining portion of the confession, phrase by phrase.

### Proclaimed among the Nations

The word proclaim can be translated preach, announce. The essence of the word is *to make an announcement*. This week senators debated rules of impeachment in the Senate, each proclaiming what they think is right. But do *we* proclaim? Isn't that just for people with platforms? Look at your social media feeds: pronouncements about presidents, gun control, racism, and abortion. *We proclaim what's precious, what's valuable to us*. Do you have something so precious, so important, so wonderfully urgent you proclaim it in person? Now you don't have to yell to proclaim. When a leper was healed by Jesus, we're told he [went out and began to talk freely \(same word\) about it, and to spread the news](#) (Mk 1:45). He was so stirred by what Jesus had *done for him* he *spoke freely*. *We proclaim what's precious*. Is Jesus precious to you? Paul writes, [I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word](#) (4:2). What

word? The word about Jesus, what his life, death, resurrection, ascension accomplished. The revolutionary event of history that changes everything. Now some might object to an emphasis on proclaiming. What about doing? Don't we need **deeds**. Absolutely, which is why each of our CGs are committed to serving the poor and marginalized. But deeds are only the near side of mission, the immanent. This confession emphasizes the far side, the transcendent power of *proclaiming Christ*. It's significant that the first and primary response to the confession is not, do a good deed, but *proclaim a good word*. The whole of Christianity hangs on a preached word. Why? Because the word is life-giving and the deed is not. The proclaimed word has residential power to transform someone spiritually and materially. A deed can only change someone temporarily, materially. There's a story in all three Gospels about a paralyzed man and his friends. Jesus is "preaching the word" in a packed house. The paralyzed man can't get in, so his friends cut a hole in the roof and lower the paralytic down mid-sermon. Eyes riveted on Jesus, he says to the paralytic, "[Son, your sins are forgiven.](#)" The pharisees exclaim, Only God can forgive. The Austinites, What about his body? He can't even move! Why didn't Jesus heal him? He says, [Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to](#)

forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” (Mk 2:9–11). And he does. So why didn’t he heal him first? Because Jesus cares about the harder thing, the more urgent thing, the disfigured state of our souls. The precious one thing that could be done *exclusively*, by God—the *forgiveness of sins*. That reunited the man with God. Perhaps you need forgiveness for not *speaking freely* of what God has done for you? The greater thing came *through a word*. **You** possess that life-giving word, the message that does the harder, more urgent, most unique thing in the world—delivers a person from guilt to forgiveness, from imprisonment to freedom, from disfigured to new creation. Psalm 32 says, Blessed—happy—is the man whose iniquity is forgiven. Will you seek other’s eternal happiness? Will you speak freely of the fountain of forgiveness? Will give away that life giving word? And proclaim *Christ* among the nations?

## **Believed on in the World**

*Believe*. You don’t know my friends. They won’t **believe**; they’ve ruled the supernatural out. They don’t think they need forgiveness. But you believed. Billions of others believed. And even if you’re committed to a secular worldview, *you have beliefs*, beliefs that reach beyond the boundaries of your worldview. The late Stephen Hawking pronounced belief in alien life so advanced they could

colonize us. Bruce Jenner believes his *soul* is female while his anatomy is male. These are spiritual beliefs. But it's also trying to get blood from a stone, to squeeze the transcendent out of the immanent. Acclaimed French philosopher Houellebecq is more honest about the implications of his secular worldview. He notes that refusing to believe in God makes Sundays in Paris *sad*, and that embracing God's absence means *life is submission to matter*. Think about that for a minute. Renouncing God means we live at the whim of atoms, nothing more nothing less. And certainly no soul. This, he says, deprives life of meaning and joy; that you can't have meaning and joy if you don't have a soul, if we aren't spiritual. JKA Smith postulates this leads to a dark night of the secularists' soul who may have the jarring experience of a sleepless night in which he awakes asking, *What if I have a soul?* Will he find a Christian ready to speak freely of the good news? To tell them that their soul is satisfied, and their sins forgiven, in Christ alone. Believed on "in the world." Belief comes through response to a word **in the world**. It does not come through the mere weighing of evidence in the head, as though our rationality hangs on evaluation of arguments. We come to believe in the threat of aliens, the anatomy of a soul through *people in the world*. The people we know, the relationships we form, the people we trust open us up to consider new views and beliefs. Recounting his own conversion, the towering African intellectual and father of

the faith, St. Augustine, said his conversion was as *relationally* conceived as it was rational, “I fell in love with him (Christian mentor), as it were, not at first as teacher of the truth—as I had not hope for that whatsoever in your church—but simply as a person who was kind to me.” His belief was hatched *in relationship, in the world*, with a kind Christian. He’d rejected Christianity, but his mentor’s love made intellectual and spiritual space for him to reconsider his beliefs. After all, faith was in his living room, at his table, each time he hung out with Ambrose. [Rosaria] Who will enter your living room to find kindness and *Christ*? Will you leave souls disfigured or give them the life-giving word? Church we are called to proclaim Christ *in the world*. Will you believe? Will you share the urgent, important, precious word of hope with those around you. Houellebecq, “What’s more, for people to convert is a sign of hope, not a threat. It means they aspire to a new kind of society.” There is only this world, and then it’s done. No second chances to enter the great society of Christ, to receive the hope of new creation. Don’t live in submission to matter, fumble through the dark night of the soul, Wake up! Turn away from the darkness and step into the light. Embrace the hope of not only a whole new society but the Savior. Ask Christ to say, “Son/Daughter, your sins are forgiven.” He will. There is no greater joy. Blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven.

## Taken up in Glory

“Taken up” is frequently used in reference to Jesus’ ascension into heaven, where he now sits in authority over the nations (Mk 16:19; Act 1:2, 11, 22). But this phrase does not emphasize the *place* of Christ’s ascension but the *manner* in which he ascended—in glory. Glory means weight, heaviness, *shocking beauty*. Jesus Christ was taken up in brilliance, angels attending as he defied gravity with his sin-forgiving Self. This Christ, eyes of fire and hands of scar tissue, is worthy of your awe. He *is* glory, weight, wonder. He is God<sup>0</sup>—the greater thing, the urgent one, most precious and worth proclaiming. City Life a whole year is spread out before us. Let’s be the household of God, a pillar and buttress of the truth, a people who proclaim Christ among the nations, urge belief in the world, and take time to sit back and soak in the wonder of it all—Christ died, Christ raised, Christ will come again.