

## **4, 8, 15, 16, 23, 42**

### How Deacons (and the Rest of Us) Hold the Mystery of the Faith

June 12, 2016 // Trevor Atwood // Shock Absorbers

From 2004 to 2010 my Wife and I faithfully tuned in on Wednesday nights to the TV show LOST.

Lost was a strange show...it's really hard to explain. Its one of those shows that when you explain it to somebody who's never seen it, when you hear the words that are coming out of your mouth....you immediately think "I sound like the biggest goofball on the planet."

Let me show you what I mean by describing the series to you now:

"See, these people have a plane crash on an island...Where a lame man can suddenly walk and women have historically died in childbirth. Also, there's a polar bear roaming around, (but only for like the first season)...oh yeah...and a cloud of black smoke that's actually a kind of monster. Of course, in the 70's there was this weird scientific commune there because of the unique electromagnetic field on the island. And also a giant Mesopotamian statue...but all that's left of it is a giant foot because a 19th century ship crashed into it... ANYWAY...There are also these weird people there called "The Others" who live in the old Science Cult--slash-Commune and also...in a temple where the black smoke monster hangs out. Then there's this guy who lives in an underground cave with a hatch at the top and everyday he has to enter a numbers 4,8,15,16,23 and 42 into a computer to keep the island from exploding. (Pay attention to this number...it shows up A LOT...eventually in a lighthouse that allows a 2000 year old man to see into the lives of 6 of the characters.)

Of Course, you can sort of control time from an underground wheel that you can spin on the island...but it might also blow up the island. Eventually, these people from the future show up...or maybe they're from the past...and well, the people get off the island, but they don't really get off the island...and then they all sort of want to go back to the island even though they were always trying to escape while they were there.

Meanwhile, there are flashbacks, then flash forwards, there are even "flash sideways".

But...don't worry...its not they are dead the whole time...or are they?

See what I'm talking about? When you try to describe Lost to someone who hasn't seen it ...you sound a little crazy...actually you sound a lot crazy!

Now, I know many of you have probably binged-watched LOST on Netflix over the course of a weekend....but the experience was something entirely different for those of us who tuned in week to week, and season to season...having to wait through long summers for the next season to begin. We hung onto season ending teasers and talked about them all summer long...trying to figure out where we were being taken.

For me personally, I went season to season, looking forward to the final episode when the writers and producers would answer all my questions.

...and that's where it all fell apart for me. After the final episode aired in May of 2010, I turned off the TV, looked at Keva, and said "We just wasted the last 6 years of our life".

In the end, the finale was polarizing. Most people either LOVED or HATED it.

There were lots of reasons that people gave for not liking the way the series wrapped up, but one of the most prevalent was this:

People hated the ending to LOST because it didn't explain ALL THE MYSTERY in the show.

What was that Statue? Why did women never survive childbirth? Why THOSE particular numbers? What in the world happened to WALT?

See, LOST was a mystery. It was a mystery made up of a lot of little mysteries. And that mystery drew me in. Over weeks, months...over 6 years, I was drawn into this mystery that kept promising something amazing. ...But ultimately, the reveal was disappointing...in fact, for some aspects of the mystery...the reveal never happened...and when I was left hanging...I felt let down, betrayed by the writers.

See, Mysteries find their greatest beauty in their completion. A puzzle with a missing piece is not "fun"....its frustrating...and you end up throwing that puzzle away.

Mysteries are like little promises. Think about a promise. It's a guarantee of something that hasn't yet happened. Mysteries are these little glimmers that show you there is something there...you just don't know what it is yet. Promises that aren't kept are called broken. Mysteries that don't reveal their beauty are just as broken.

Without that satisfying end, without a glorious reveal... ... I'm walking away feeling like I was lied to.

Today, the elders of this church are going to recommend 6 candidates for you to consider as the first deacons of City Church. We are going to assign each of them a number (4, 8, 15, 16, 23, 42...and then a year from now tell you what those numbers mean.) Also, there is a polar bear in the lobby.

Look, today, I want you to see what SORT of people God calls a deacon to be.

But I also want you to know WHY its so important that deacons have a particular kind of character.

...because, at the end of the day, it's the same reason that God is calling you to this sort of character. ...and it has everything to do with revealing a mystery.

Here we go.

### **1 Timothy 3:8-16**

**Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.**

**I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:**

**He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.**

The word mystery comes up twice in this text, and its directly connected to the kind of character a deacon, or servant of the church, is suppose to have.

So if we are going to understand the character of a deacon, we have to figure out what this mystery is.

1) God's justice & mercy is the mystery. Jesus is the final episode.

The thesis statement for the letter that Paul is writing to his young pastor friend Timothy is right here in his passage we just read.

Take a look.

### **1 Timothy 3:14-15**

**I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.**

Paul tells Timothy, I'm trying to get to you, but in case I can't make it, I have something that you HAVE to know, so I sent you this letter. I want you to know how the church, the family of God, the body of Christ...Christians should behave. How they should treat one another and the outside world.

## 1 Timothy 3:16

**Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.**

Then he points to what the church confesses. The core of our belief. And he calls it “the mystery of godliness”.

Here’s what he’s saying. If you want to know how you should act as a Christian, you have to look to what you believe, what you confess and let your actions flow out of that. So many of us look to how we want to act, and then find something to believe that affirms the way we want to live.

Here’s the problem with that: If you base the what you believe on the way you already live, you are your own god. You aren’t really searching for truth outside of you. You are just looking for something to make you feel better about the way you act.

Sometimes I’ll talk to a young guy and he’ll say, “I like a lot about what you are telling me about Jesus and this Christian thing, but before I believe in this stuff, does it mean I have to stop sleeping with my girlfriend?”

But see that question assumes that you already know that sleeping with your girlfriend is best. It asks the wrong question. It shows you aren’t really interested in the truth. If you were, the first thing you would ask is “Is this true?”. If it is, then you’d absolutely want to bring every part of your life in line with the truth.

So Paul says, “Want to know how you should live your life...look first to what is true, the mystery of godliness.” Then, he quotes this little hymn that fully reveals the mystery. This little hymn is like a really good final episode. It reveals everything we wondered about in the mystery. But the mystery of godliness is not about polar bears, or a sequence of numbers or figuring out how to travel backwards, forwards or sideways in time.

The mystery of God is this: How can God be pure, holy, perfect...JUST...at the same time is merciful, abounding in grace and patience toward people who hurt and rejected him.

You know, the Bible is not a collection of disconnected stories and letters. Its one book. Its kind of like a TV series that took thousands of years to develop. It’s a mystery that’s been pushing you to a resolution in a final episode.

And the plotline of the Bible is this. God created humans to have an ongoing eternal relationship with him. But we rejected him. We didn’t think life with God was good enough. We believed that something else was better. So we left him. ...we found our meaning in something besides a relationship with God.

We put something or someone else in God's rightful place. And just like you would demand justice for someone who murdered your child, so God who is completely just can't overlook injustice.

So as you read through the Old Testament you find all of these promises where God says that he will punish sin...that man will be dealt with justly, receiving what we deserve for our spiritual adultery.

But then, consistently all the way through the Old Testament God makes this other promise. That he is going to save his people. That he is going to be merciful and abounding in love and grace. That he will restore and renew his people.

And for thousands of years, throughout the Old Testament, there is this tension happening. God is just...and he will not overlook sin. ON the other hand, he is merciful and patient and abounding in steadfast love...and he will bring his people back into peace...and into a right relationship with him.

See, God's character is the mystery. HOW IN THE WORLD CAN GOD KEEP BOTH PROMISES TO BE JUST and TO BE MERCIFUL? What is this Polar Bear doing on this Island? (Why is that Pug wearing a Captain's Hat?)

You want to experience some of the tension of this mystery? Read through the Old Testament.

You're reading about the ugliness of sin and rejection and God's people leaving him and forgetting about him, then you're reading chapter after chapter of judgment and punishment and justice....then...like a little light shining in the darkness comes another promise...to relent, to save, to set aside a people for God's family. Promises to change hearts of stone to hearts of compassion. Promises to never leave or forsake. Promises to make everything new.

Let me give you a couple of examples.

### **Ezekiel 16:59-60**

**“For thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant.**

On one hand God says to his people, “I will deal with you as you have done...you have cheated me and broke your promises...and you will get what that deserves...you'll be cut off from me.” On the other hand, “YET, I will keep my covenant, my unwavering promise to deliver you and make you prosper forever.”

Or how about this from the prophet Jeremiah.

### **Jeremiah 31:30a & 33b-34b**

**But everyone shall die for his own iniquity...And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ... for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."**

Do you see the mystery here? This is a Polar Bear on a Tropical Island. God's mercy and justice is a mystery that needs to be solved. One hand, we will die for our sin...JUSTICE. ON the other hand, we will be with God and he will forgive our sin...MERCY.

How can we make sense of a promise-keeping God making two promises that seem directly opposed to each other? This is the mystery of godliness.

For thousands of years, From Adam on the Eastside of the Garden, to Noah on the boat, to Abraham at the edge of Sodom, To Moses in the desert, To Joshua in Canaan, To Samuel, To Samson, To Saul To David, and Solomon...Isaiah and Jeremiah to Jonah at Nineveh and Habakkuk watching the Babylonians destroy Israel...

The mystery keeps going from season to season, and God's people keep hoping for a final episode that resolves the tension...they keep waiting for the reveal...hoping only in this mystery...this PROMISE...this Covenant.

In the Old Testament, season after season, the Lost souls are searching, looking, hoping for the mystery to be resolved. For the promise to finally be kept.

Then New Testament. A baby is born in Bethlehem. He grows up claiming to be the Son of God. Both perfectly executing justice and love. He is full-on truth and full-on grace. He goes around telling people about this kingdom of God, healing people, raising people from the dead, telling people their sins are forgiven...

But then he's rejected. Beaten. And murdered. And three days later, he's alive. Eyewitness accounts are recorded. Then he ascends to heaven and tells all his followers to make his message known around the world...that through faith in HIM, humanity can finally be reconciled to God. He explains that on the cross, he fulfilled the justice of God. The death, the separation, the darkness, the thirst, the disintegration of our body and soul....Jesus took for us on the cross.

So that we could be forgiven. So that we could enter the kingdom of God, whole. So that all the promises that God made throughout history...all of the promises to save, to renew... they could all be honored.

The cross of Jesus Christ and his resurrection are the fulfillment of the justice and mercy

of God. It is God himself taking the justice we deserve, while also forgiving us and putting us back together.

That's why its called the gospel. GOOD NEWS. It's the final episode no one was expecting, but everybody loved.

The mystery of godliness- "Is God Just or is He Merciful" is perfectly answered in Jesus Christ.

## **2 Corinthians 1:20a**

**For all the promises of God find their Yes in [Jesus].**

The author of the book of Hebrews puts it like this:

## **Hebrews 1:1-3**

**Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,**

See, Jesus is the way that all the promises that God made through the prophets, like Ezekiel and Jeremiah, come true. Jesus is the reveal of the mystery of Godliness.

## **1 Timothy 3:16**

**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,**

This little song is the summation of the final episode. The Gospel. God became flesh in Jesus Christ. He died and was raised from the dead proving that his sacrifice perfectly satisfied the justice of God and made a way for sinners to enter the promised kingdom of God...His death wasn't pointless...it was vindicated by the Spirit

Then his followers obeyed his command and went out to the nations proclaiming this good news, not just to ISRAEL...but to every tribe and tongue and nation...the whole world...And Jesus is now ascended to heaven, he's seated at the right hand of the Father, now our advocate...and everywhere Satan brings accusation that our sin MUST condemn us to death, Jesus says, "I already died for that sin. Justice has been served."

See, in Jesus Christ, there are no loose ends. The mystery of godliness is completely resolved. God is just. God is love. And there is not an ounce of contradiction in that.

Now what in the world does this have to do with deacons? Well...

2) Deacons are servants of the mystery.

Last week, we said deacons are the church's shock absorbers. In a lot of ways, they are first responders. The word deacon literally means "servant". And deacons serve the church by caring for the people of the church, especially in difficulty and crisis.

But deacons don't just serve people. They also serve the mystery. In other words as an official representative of the church, a deacons' life should be lived in such way that it makes it easier for people to BELIEVE the GOSPEL...instead of harder to believe.

And, just in case you are sitting back saying, "Well, I'm not a deacon, so I don't need to worry about that", the truth is in the New Testament, if you are a Christian, Paul calls you an "Ambassador of Christ". So there is nothing in this character description of deacons that is not also what you are called to. Just because you don't have an official title in the church, doesn't mean that God doesn't intend your life to serve the mystery of godliness.

The 19th century preacher, DL Moody said, "Out of 100 men, one will read the Bible, the other 99 will read the Christian."

This is why its so important that your character matches this mystery of the gospel. Because you are a walking summary of the gospel. In the way you treat people, in the way you love your spouse and kids, in the way you go about your job...you are either helping people believe the gospel...or you're helping them reject it.

Your daily life should be marked by caring deeply about justice, doing the right thing...and standing always ready to forgive others when they wrong you. The Prophet Micah puts it like this:

### **Micah 6:8**

**He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?**

See, when you tell people about the gospel, it can really sound as crazy as the plot of Lost..."Yeah, I believe God created everything, then a snake tempted this naked couple to eat some fruit, then everything broke. And the way its all fixed is God actually becomes a 1st century Jewish man, dies by Roman execution, three days later comes back to life, floats up to heaven...MEANWHILE...we're all waiting for him to blow a trumpet, and come back riding a white horse in the sky."

That's why its so important that our actions and character testify that these things are true.



## **1 Timothy 3:15**

**if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.**

How the family of God behaves makes us a Pillar or a Buttress of the truth. A buttress is not a female butler and a pillar is not another word for a pharmacist.

They are columns that support a structure. The way you behave as a Christian IS the way we support the truth. We don't make it true or false, the truth is true no matter how you act...The truth is true whether anyone believes it or not.

But we make easier to see. We support it, hold it up to be seen and believed...by the way we behave.

Ok, so lets look at what that character is as it applies to deacons...

## **1 Timothy 3:8**

**Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.**

Deacons are to be dignified. In other words a deacon should be someone you can take seriously. A person who is respected by people that know them.

Deacons are not double-tongued. This means they don't say one thing to one person, then go to another person and say something else. Deacons can't be two-faced.

They are not addicted to wine or money. Its important that it is the Spirit of God that is controlling a Christian, not alcohol or money. When you are controlled by an outside substance, instead of motivated by the gospel, you won't serve people, you'll do whatever it takes to serve yourself.

## **1 Timothy 3:10**

**And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.**

Deacons should be tested. The Deacons we are going to present for your consideration today are entering into a months long process of testing with us, where we will look closely at their character and their lives. BTW, Blameless doesn't mean "without sin". If that were the case, there would be no deacons...or elders for that matter. Blameless means that when you look at their lives and make accusations, those accusations don't stick. It means that there isn't an ongoing lack of repentance and looking to Jesus in these particular areas of character.

## **1 Timothy 3:11**

**Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.**

Ok, now let me answer a question some of you may have been asking all along. Can deacons be both men and women?

The short answer is Yes. In fact, today we are going to present to you 3 men and 3 women to be the first deacons at City Church.

So let me tell you WHY I think this what the Bible teaches. First, this word "Wives" in verse 11 is actually not that specific of a word. The greek word is "Goon-nay." You may have seen the 80's teen movie about female deacons that find an underground pirate ship and save their town. Goo-nays.

And that's it...that's why I think women can be deacons. No. This word Goo-nay simply means women.

Additionally, it seems very odd that Paul would give qualifications for a deacons' wife and not say anything about elders' wives in the section just before this, considering elders hold an authoritative position in the church, and deacons do not.

## **Romans 16:1-2**

**I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.**

When Paul finishes his letter to the Roman church, he tells them to welcome Phoebe, a DEACON of the church. That word servant there is the male form of the word "Deacon", which seems to indicate that the word is not merely describing Phoebe as a person who serves...but counting her in the office of deacon.

In fact, its pretty certain that Phoebe is the deacon who carried this letter to Rome. In other words, Phoebe is entrusted with making sure the BIBLE gets passed on...which is a pretty big deal.

And, though I have more to say about this, let me say that being a deacon doesn't violate any God given gender roles. Remember a couple of weeks ago, we talked about from Creation, God made women to image him as "helpers"....just like God calls himself a helper. Well, there is absolutely nothing that a deacon is called to do as a servant that contradicts that role. In fact, look at the word Paul uses to describe Phoebe in verse 2. He says she has been a "patron" of many and of myself. That word means, A woman who has been helping.

Paul commends Phoebe as a deacon, BECAUSE she has been such a help to so many!

### **1 Timothy 3:11**

**Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.**

Now, for some of you, you are like “of course women can be deacons”, but I know that many of you grew up in traditions where this was not the case. I want you to know that I don't think this is CRYSTAL clear in the Bible. And there are pastors that I respect and listen to that would say differently...and that's OK.

Also, there are churches, most of the one's I grew up in, in fact, that see the role of deacon as more of one like an elder. In that case, it makes more sense to follow the guidelines of an elder, which I think the Scripture clearly lays out as being an office for men only.

One last thing before we move on. Where ever you happen to be on this issue, I'd ask you this. If you leave here today confused, or angry, or self-righteous, I can tell you for sure that is NOT what God wants for you or this church. PLEASE, have a conversation with our elders about this if this creates any of those reactions in you. Remember, deacons are here to preserve unity, not to destroy it.

Ok, Paul says that these women must also be dignified, not slanderers...in other words...double-tongued...rather, they are to be sober-minded and faithful in all things.

Here's what sober-minded means. It means even-keeled. It means that when things are really bad, these ladies aren't claiming that the sky is falling. And when things are really good, they aren't over-celebrating. Because they believe the gospel. See on one hand, the gospel keeps you from ever being satisfied with the way things are. Because you know that until Jesus comes back and makes all things new, that nothing, no person, no mountain, no tree, no job, no life situation is the way its supposed to be. So I don't lose my mind when things are going really great, because I know its nothing compared to what it will be like when Jesus makes it better.

On the other hand, I also don't freak out when life falls apart. Because my hope is not in my marriage, or kids, or job, or popularity, or education...so when those things fail me...I don't act like all is lost. My hope is in Jesus, who has already revealed how God is both perfectly just...and also how he has forgiven me. So I know God's promise to fix everything is going to happen.

That is sober-minded. Faithful in all things simply means that the gospel is worked down into all my relationships and life situations.

## 1 Timothy 3:12

### **Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.**

Paul says that deacons should be literally “One woman men”. This is about character...not status. It does not mean that deacons can't have divorce in their past. It means they should display the belief that one man is intended for one woman in marriage. In my opinion, ongoing pornography use would more quickly disqualify a man from being a deacon than having a past divorce. Additionally, it says that male deacons should manage their household well. That simply means that they are parenting in a biblical way. Pointing their kids to Jesus and disciplining them in a way that reflects the God of Justice and Mercy.

In the end, deacons serve the mystery of the gospel with their lives as much as they serve you. That's why its imperative that you speak into who we appoint as deacons.

We want you, the congregation, to look at the men and women we present to you and see if this list of qualifications describes them. More on that at the end of this service.

Before I finish today, I have a confession to make. The reason I hated the final episode of lost isn't mainly because it left questions un-answered. The reason I hated the final episode of Lost is because of the one question it tried to answer...and lied about.

See, the thing about the Truth, is that its still the truth no matter how badly we wish it wasn't.

Most of us, ...and if we're honest... all of us have pasts we wish were different. Things we've done that we regret. People we've hurt. Ways that our lives haven't been a pillar or buttress of the truth, but instead, worked against it.

And as much as we wish that was different, wishing doesn't change anything. But God...

3) God changes sinners to priests not because of what we do, but because of what he did.

The show LOST really isn't a mystery. Its more about the characters. Its people trying to make their pasts right. Through the entirety of the show, those trapped on the island are confronted with their sins. The way they have been hurt...and in response, the way they hurt others.

In the final episode, their pasts are resolved. They all find themselves in this church. They are hugging each other, relationships restored.

It's a picture of what Jesus promises to do. To forgive our sins and restore our relationship to God and each other.

But you know how the characters on Lost brought this about? In some weird parallel universe, they were given the opportunity to get it right. To redo what they did wrong. And when they finally got it right, they were no longer a prisoner of the Island...they were free to enjoy eternity.

But that's not the truth. Its not the gospel. There is no amount of striving...no amount of good character...or good works that can erase your past.

If there was, then the entire mystery of the Bible, Jesus Christ and his cross and resurrection are pointless.

If Jesus is just a good man whose character we are supposed to emulate, then he died for nothing.

Even if you could somehow redo your past, how can you be sure that your future is without sin?

There is only one sure way to know your sins are forgiven, your past is erased and your future is safe with God.

That's to put your faith in Jesus as GOD himself who took your place. Who DIED FOR YOU. And Resurrected to open the door to eternity.

He's not asking you to make up for your sin. He's calling you to believe he's already paid for it. And once you see the love and forgiveness God has toward you in Jesus, you will gladly live to represent that love and forgiveness for the rest of your days.

My favorite character from Lost was a guy named "Mr. Eko". Mr. Eko was from Nigeria. He led a group of guerilla warriors to save his brother from some Drug Dealers.

But his brother was killed and Mr. Eko assumed his brother's identity as a priest.

On the island, he dies when he confronts the Black Smoke Monster...the embodiment of evil. He even calls it the devil.

After he had left show, the actor that played Mr. Eko was spotted by a fan who said that he was the guy who was a criminal that pretended to be a priest.

To which Mr. Eko replied, "No, actually, I was priest pretending to be a criminal."

Jesus is better than Mr. Eko. See, Jesus is the perfect priest. He is the one who speaks to his father on our behalf. Yet, he took on our sin. He died the death of a criminal so the real criminals would be called "priests". So that we would represent this GOD of Justice and Mercy.

...and through his death would be reconciled back to our Father. When Jesus was crucified, he hung between two criminals. One of those saw through the criminal on the outside...to the priest on the inside. He saw that Jesus was perfect. Unstained by his own sin. And he knew, confessed that Jesus was being crucified in his place.

In that moment, Jesus looked at him and said, "Today, you will be with me in paradise"

See, the way to paradise, the way to have sins erased, to become like Jesus is not to imitate Jesus' actions...its to believe that the priest became a criminal, so the Criminals could become priests.