

Titus 3:1-11

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[0 : 00] I was ten years old and having the time of my life at a Scripture Union beach camp on the Pacific coast just outside Lima, when an overly zealous, at least in my opinion, an overly zealous and very much in-your-face leader at the camp accosted me with a most unwelcome question. He looked intensely into my eyes and he asked me, are you saved?

Now this was a seriously awkward moment that I really could have done without. And as I hummed and hawed and basically just wished that he would go away, I was rescued by an angel. Well, it was actually one of the other leaders, but as far as I was concerned, his role was angelic. He sensed my discomfort and he no doubt tactfully intervened. Now I have no recollection as to what he said, but suffice to say, I was off the hook. That particular question could wait for another day and at least in my opinion for a much more appropriate moment. Are you saved? I wonder if you find that an awkward or a difficult question. I think part of my problem was that I wasn't really very sure if I was or not. Saved, that is. Contrary to what the leader might have imagined, it was not for me at any rate a simple yes or no answer. I really don't know what I would have eventually said had I been forced to give an answer. What is certainly true is that our ability to answer the question, and it is an important question, will in considerable measure be a function of our understanding of what it means to be saved. And in this regard, Paul, in his letter to Titus, provides a very helpful, what we might almost call executive summary of what it means to be saved.

We've read verses from Titus chapter 3, and I want you to notice three words that we find in the second half of verse 5, where Paul expresses himself in this way as he writes to Titus. He saved us. The first three words in actual fact of verse 5. He saved us. Just three words, but with the help of what Paul says immediately before those words, immediately after those words, we get a snapshot of what it means to be saved. Now, for those of us here this evening who are able, in, I trust, grateful humility, are able to assert that we are indeed saved, I trust that this will serve as an encouraging reminder of what God has done and is doing in our lives. And for those who, like me as I wriggled in the

Pacific sand, are unsure as to where they stand, I trust this will help to clarify your thinking and help you to honestly answer what is a very important question. Are you saved?

Now, the manner in which we're going to think about what Paul says here in very brief compass on this matter of being saved, the manner we're going to do it is by posing questions to the text, not a particularly original way of doing it, but nonetheless, I hope, helpful. And I'll tell you what the questions are, and then we can proceed to think of them each in term. First of all, what is it that we are saved from? The very verb implies that we are saved from something, and we want to notice just briefly what Paul says in that regard. What are we saved from?

[4 : 29] Secondly, who are we saved by? Then, thirdly, on what grounds are we saved? And then, fourthly, what does God do to save us? What is it that God actually does to bring this about to save us? And then, lastly, just notice what Paul says concerning what we are saved for.

And I think as we answer these questions, the answers that we give together will give a helpful, I trust, summary of this very important matter of what is involved, what it means to be saved.

First of all, then, what are we saved from? Well, verse 3 in Titus chapter 3 presents that for us, or gives us an answer to that question. At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. Paul paints an unto flattering picture of the human condition, and yet, on careful and, I think, honest analysis, we have to conclude that it is an accurate one.

There is much that he says in this verse, but the key words, it seems to me, or in any case, the words that I want to briefly focus on, are these words, deceived and enslaved. At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved. We are saved from that, from deception, from

enslavement. Now, some might protest and say, well, speak for yourself. I don't consider myself either deceived or enslaved. Let me just tell you a little anecdote that might illustrate a little this matter of how we can be both deceived and enslaved and not even be aware of that.

Some of you will be familiar with Tim Keller, who is a minister of the Presbyterian Church in America in New York. And the work, the church planting work that he began in Manhattan, in the very center of New York, has been greatly blessed by God, and the church has grown in a very marvelous way.

[6 : 57] And Tim Keller shares his experience at the very beginning of that work, when there was just a handful of folk, and as he was trying to work out how to plant a church there in the very center of New York, a very, in many ways, a very secular city. And his particular concern was to reach the young urban professionals who worked and lived and partied in central New York. And what he discovered was that as he presented the gospel, it may be what he considered to be the traditional presentation, and speaking of our sin and our need of a Savior and of forgiveness, there seemed to be little connection. And as he would get to know some of these young folk, he was conscious that they seemed to have very little sense of sin. And so when he spoke of sin and of the need of forgiveness, it didn't really resonate. And of course, that makes sense. If somebody has no conception that sin is a problem, then they will have little sense of their need of forgiveness. And as he struggled in his mind how to connect with his audience, with those whom he spoke with, and to begin with, it wasn't really so much that they were gathering to hear him preach, but as he would speak to them one-on-one.

A connection that he was able to establish was identifying that for these young folk, and of course, this is a very broad-brush description. People are complex and not all come under one umbrella. But generally speaking, he found that one of their core values, if you wish, was freedom, this idea of freedom. And they considered themselves to be those who enjoyed great freedom, freedom of thought, freedom of expression, sexual freedom, freedom of behavior. They were free.

And the lives that they lived and the success that they enjoyed in their professional careers were means to that goal of being free, not being constrained in any way. Even the material success gave them that freedom that they aspired to and that they thought that they enjoyed and wanted to enjoy in ever greater measure. And as he identified this as being very much at the heart of their thinking, of their worldview, if you wish, he was able to, in a sense, draw them to consider whether the very things that they so much enjoyed and aspired to, success and wealth and status, were not the very things that were enslaving them. So here they were. They thought they were free.

They gloried in their freedom, no longer restricted by the religion or the morals of their parents or grandparents or of previous generations. They were free.

[10 : 09] And yet, were they so free. Those very things that they thought brought them freedom, money, success, status. Some of them were able to recognize as they thought honestly about their situation, that far from granting them freedom, they were enslaved. They had been deceived and enslaved, deceived into thinking that professional success and material prosperity would give them the freedom that they so much aspired to. And it wasn't so. They'd been deceived. And in the process, not only deceived, but enslaved. Because even as they recognized that these things were not delivering, they could not change their lifestyle or decide to go in another direction. They were trapped by those very things that they thought would bring freedom. This is what Paul says here. He says that the human condition is one where we live deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. Now, what those passions and pleasures are in any individual case can vary greatly. There are a multiplicity of passions and pleasures. Some of them are maybe, to our minds, unpleasant and scandalous, or some of them may seem very respectable. But nonetheless, passions and pleasures that deceive us, that offer what they cannot deliver and enslave us. This is the human condition. It is this that we require to be saved from.

Paul also mentions, and I just mentioned it in the passing, another feature of the human condition in highlighting our pride and selfishness. There in the second half of the verse, he speaks of how we lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. And again, the language may seem very strong to us. And maybe there would be those who would protest and say, well, that doesn't really describe me. But at the heart of malice and of envy is the pride and the selfishness that is at the core of all of us. That is what we are by nature, proud and selfish men and women. Again, how that finds expression may be very different. But nonetheless, if we honestly examine ourselves, we can come to no other conclusion.

So, there is this need that we be saved from this condition, from our deception and from our slavery.

But notice that Paul introduces this portrait of the human condition with revealing words. There in verse 3, he introduces what he has to say with these words, at one time, we too were foolish and so on.

Paul is stating and recognizing that though that was his condition and the condition of the believers that he is writing to, that has changed. This is no longer true of the believers. It's not that they're perfect. It's not that they no longer sin. It's not that they no longer are subject to deception in a measure.

[13 : 54] But nonetheless, there has been a radical and a fundamental change in their condition. At one time, that was their condition, but no longer.

We have been saved from this slavery, from this deception, from this obsession with self. But the next thing we can consider in what Paul says here is the question, who are we saved by? And the answer to that is provided for us in verse 4.

And verse 4 identifies both the author of our salvation and also the motivation that drives the Savior. We think, first of all, of the identity of the Savior. Well, Paul presents it in very clear language.

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, so there's no adubiety, it's very clear, God our Savior. He is the author of salvation. God is the one who saves. God saves.

We cannot save ourselves. The deceit that we are the victims of, the chains that we are enslaved by, are too powerful. We are wholly dependent on the divine initiative to save us. We'll think a little bit more about this when we consider the next question of the grounds of our salvation. But who is this God who saves? Who is He? Well, this God has revealed Himself in a personal way that allows us to see Him and to know Him. And He does so in the person of Jesus Christ. The manner in which Jesus is spoken of in this very same passage is, Jesus Christ our Savior. And Jesus Christ our Savior, says Paul in verse 4, has appeared, when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared. Where this use of the verb appeared is so clearly a reference to the incarnation. And so, this God who saved has made Himself known, has appeared in the person of Jesus Christ as He came into the world to save us. So, we are saved by God in the person of Jesus Christ.

[16 : 28] But we also notice that not only are we told by Paul who saves us, but what is the motivation behind God's saving initiative? And there's much that could be said about that. But we limit ourselves to what Paul says in this passage, and especially what we read there in verse 4. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us. God is motivated by, He is driven by, His kindness and His love. The word kindness that we find here speaks of, He is driven by, His kindness and His love. And He is driven by His love. And the word that Paul uses here, the word that we have translated love, is an intriguing one and a revealing one. I'm sure you are aware that there are a number of words in Greek that can be translated love. And each of them has their own particular emphasis, I suppose you could say. Well, the word that he uses here is one that he doesn't commonly use. But it's a word that we can easily recognize. The Greek word translated love in verse 4 is the word philanthropia. Now, as I say, that's a word that we can easily recognize because it has been adopted as is in English. We have the word of course philanthropy.

But what does it mean? What does it literally mean? Well, it's a composite word in the original Greek, made up of two words, love and man, anthropos, man. So, the word that Paul uses here on this occasion, when he is describing to us what it is that drives God in this saving work, what it is that motivates God, that He would save sinners such as we are, is love of man, love of men and women. God loves people. Now, that's a simple truth. But as we just for a moment step back and consider it, is it not a wonderful and comforting truth that God is a God who loves people, all kinds of people, regardless of our condition, regardless of how unlovable we might appear to ourselves and certainly to others, God is characterized by, in His very nature, there is this love that is a love that loves people, loves men and women.

When I was just giving some thought to this truth, I was reminded in my own mind, I was just taken back to the story of Jonah. And we don't have time to go into it in any detail, but you're familiar with the story. And particularly right at the end of the book of Jonah, where Jonah is lamenting the fact that God is showing mercy to Nineveh. And God is endeavoring to make Jonah understand why it is that he has relented from his anger and from the judgment that he had pronounced on this wicked city. And the argument that God basically gives is, there are so many people in Nineveh, how could I not show mercy? There's so many people, how could I not show mercy to such a city? And what

God is saying to Jonah is, I love people.

You've got to understand that, I love people. Maybe you find them very disagreeable and especially Ninevites. But I love people. Yes, even Ninevites. This is what motivates God, that he would save the likes of us when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared. Now this kindness and love have characterized God eternally. Love is of the very essence of the nature of God. God is love, as the scriptures very clearly teach. But this kindness and love become especially visible at a given point in history. Paul speaks of how they appeared. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, they appeared. They became visible in the person and in the work of Jesus. We know how John, as he begins his gospel, tells us that with the coming of Jesus, the Word became flesh. But I think we can safely say and legitimately say on the grounds of what Paul says here in this letter to Titus, we can speak of love becoming flesh. That Jesus is kindness incarnate. That Jesus is love incarnate.

[21 : 55] And when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us. So we are saved by God, a God who is motivated by his kindness and love, and love very especially for men and women like you and me.

But a third question that we can pose as we have this picture being painted of what it is to be saved. The third question is on what grounds are we saved. And Paul answers that question also. In verse 5, he declares that God saved us. And then he immediately goes on to say the following, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. So here he very explicitly develops this matter of the grounds upon which we are saved. And of course what he says there only serves to reinforce what has just been said concerning God as the author of our salvation. God is our Savior and he is wholly responsible for our salvation. We bring nothing to the table. We have nothing to bring. It's not even that God looks down and tries to identify among the masses maybe a deserving sinner here and there. Maybe one or other who is making some effort. Futile perhaps because ultimately nobody can save themselves, but at least having a good go at pleasing God and at that sorting out their their sin problem. No, God doesn't look down and say, oh, well, here's somebody making a big effort. I'll give them a helping hand. No, it is all of God. God. The grounds of our salvation are not because of anything we had done, but because of his mercy. There is no such thing as a deserving sinner, for we deserve nothing and God owes us nothing.

[24 : 01] Our righteousness, our good deeds, cannot be the grounds of our salvation, for we have none. On what grounds then are we saved? Well, Paul tells us, but because of his mercy. It is mercy all, immense and free.

Now, this truth is very eloquently and cogently expressed in the passage that we read earlier on in the service in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

The next question that we pose and answer briefly is, what does God do to save us? And here we can distinguish between what God has done in history in order to secure our salvation and what God does in our own individual experience to apply to ourselves this saving work. And both of these are mentioned by Paul in these brief verses. First of all, as we think of what God has done in history, well, that is what Paul refers to in verse 4 when he speaks of, when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us. And given that Paul makes this statement, He saved us, in the context of having spoken of God's appearing, which we, I think, have very reasonably identified as a reference to the incarnation and Jesus coming and doing His saving work. Then when Paul here speaks of He saved us, he's not, I think, speaking of his own personal experience of salvation, or indeed of any of his readers. But he's speaking of the manner in which God secured our salvation in history by the work of

Jesus Christ, the manner in which Jesus came in order to secure our salvation, the manner in which the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, the manner in which He lived that sinless life, the manner in which He was tempted in all ways as we are yet without sin, the manner in which He handed Himself over to death on the cross, the death in our place, the manner in which the Father raised Him triumphant from the grave. And in all of this He saved us. He secured salvation for His people. So what does God do to save us? Well, He's done all of this in the person of Jesus Christ. That is what He has done in history, we might say. But of course, there's also what He does in our own personal experience, in order that we might enjoy salvation, in order that salvation might be applied to us in our own experience. And this is something that Paul also speaks of in these verses. In the second half of verse 5, He saved us. Again, the same language, but now He moves from

history, He moves to personal experience. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. God applies His saving work to us individually by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who is given this responsibility of applying

Christ's saving work to individuals, men and women like ourselves. And the work of the Holy Spirit here is spoken of in two ways, or two words are used, each having their own particular meaning. It speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit in our rebirth and in our renewal. It speaks of the work of the Spirit in our rebirth. It speaks of that mysterious work of regeneration, whereby the sinner who is dead in his trespasses and sins is born again into new life.

[28 : 17] A work of the Spirit in our life. A work of the Spirit in our life. A work that is done, and when it is done, we are new creatures. But the work of the Spirit does not end there in granting us this new life, in this work of regeneration, in granting us a new heart. But the work of the Spirit is one that continues as He renews us. The washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

And so there is that continuing work. And of course, God's saving work is a continuing work. Though Paul is able to speak as he does here of our salvation being something that is a done deal, as it were. He saved us. Yet he also, on other occasions, speaks of how it is a continuing work. How we continue to be saved. And indeed, we look forward to the consummation of God's saving work in our own lives as we look into the future to that day when we will be granted a glorified body and be granted the privilege of an eternity in God's presence.

So what does God do to save us? Well, Paul makes reference to what he has done in history in procuring our salvation in Jesus Christ, but also what he does in our own personal experience by the Holy Spirit. Moving on to the last question that we want to think about as we try and draw out some of the things that Paul explains here concerning what it is to be saved. And the last question that I'd introduced just a few moments ago was, what are we saved for? And for that, we can just look at what Paul goes on to say in verse 7. Verse 7 begins with the words, so that. Those words already suggest that what he's going to go on to say has the idea of purpose. So, for what reason, for what purpose are we saved? So that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life. What are we saved for? Well, even in these few words, we can mention three things. We are saved for a new status, that we would enjoy a new status, justified by His grace. Before, we stood condemned, rightly condemned before God. But God justifies us. He declares us righteous. It's a legal language, which previously condemned, now justified as Christ's righteousness is credited to our account.

So we're saved that we might enjoy this new status before God. Saved also that we might be part of a new family, the new family of God. Paul speaks of us being heirs. We know that the heir is the son, the son is the heir, and we become heirs of God as part of the family of God. So we are saved that we might enjoy being part of God's family, this new redeemed family. But saved also that we might have a new present and a new future. In the words of Paul, having the hope of eternal life. Now, I think we know that eternal life isn't only a reference to some distant future. Eternal life is what we enjoy in the here and now. Now, I think here Paul does seem to be suggesting more that look forward into the future. But of course, we are saved for that eternal life in the here and now, and also into the future.

So there we have very briefly some consideration of this question, what are we saved for as Paul deals with it in the words he addresses to Titus. As we draw things to a close, or as we would conclude what we have to say, maybe there is a final question, one that we hadn't anticipated or didn't mention at the beginning. And the question would be this, in the light of all that we've seen, in the light of all that we've been able to examine here as Paul describes for us this matter of our salvation. Is there anything that we need to do? Maybe there are those this evening who were able to identify in a manner with my own discomfort and uncertainty at being asked, are you saved? And in the light of what we have seen this evening, you're anxious to be able to answer that question, and to answer it humbly but confidently in the affirmative, to be able to say, yes, thank God, yes, I am saved. Well, what must you do to be able to answer that question? If all that we've been saying has been so much recognizing that we can do nothing, that we can do nothing to procure our own salvation, it's all of God, what then can I do?

[33 : 57] Well, Paul does identify two things that we must do in response to what God has done. And those two things are, we can identify them in what he says in verse 8. Having painted this picture of what salvation involves, he goes on to say, this is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to

doing what is good. The two things that we have to do could be summarized in this way. Trust God and do good.

Trust God. Recognize what God has done. Recognize that he has indeed done everything that is needful for your salvation. That in Jesus Christ, everything has been done and salvation is freely offered to you.

And all that you must do is receive. Trust in God. Trust in what he has done. Trust that what he has done is sufficient. Trust that his diagnosis of your condition is an accurate one. Trust in what he has done. Put your trust in him. Put your trust in Jesus. That he would be your savior. That these benefits that he has secured for you would be your own. And as you trust God, so you are able to then live a life of doing good. This is Paul's concern. That the believers that he is writing to, as they appreciate all that God has done, would recognize that their response, a response of love and of gratitude, is that they would devote themselves to doing what is good. Devote yourselves to doing what is good. And of course, that is a lesson or an exhortation that we all can take on board. That we would devote ourselves to doing what is good to doing what is good. Not, we know very well, that this might secure for us salvation. That this might secure God's favor. But rather because God already looks favorably on us, that our grateful response would be that we would trust in him, that we would continue to trust in him, and that we would devote ourselves to doing what is good. Let us pray.