

Communion

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[0 : 00] At the Lord's table as we participate in the sacrament, we are very conscious that we look backwards. We look back to Calvary. We look back and consider what Jesus has done for us in handing Himself over to death in our place. And that backward look or that backward gaze is very obvious, if you wish. Even as we eat the bread and drink the wine, it takes us or it directs our attention to that which occurred in the past outside Jerusalem. But in the passage that we've read in the warrant that we have for celebrating this sacrament, we're also encouraged to look forward, to look into the future. In verse 26, there in 1 Corinthians 11, we read, for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

These last three words very clearly direct us forward, that we will look forward to a day that is yet to come. And we participate, as we will even this evening, with that in mind until He comes.

What is Paul speaking of when he speaks of this? What was Jesus speaking of when He spoke in this way?

To what coming was He referring? Well, He's speaking of His own second coming, when He will come again in glory, the coming or appearing of Jesus. And I want us to consider this evening a passage that speaks of His coming, a coming that is yet to be, or His appearing, to use another word that the Bible use in this regard. And turn with me to Titus chapter 2, and we're going to read there three verses, four verses in fact. Titus chapter 2 and verses 11 to 14. You'll find that on page 1199 in the church Bible. Titus chapter 2 and reading verses 11 to 14.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age. While we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own eager to do what is good. The Word of God. This passage, these verses that we have read, speak of three appearance. Two of them very explicitly where the very word is used, appearance or appearing, there in verse 11. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. And then also we find the same word in verse 13. While we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great

[3 : 44] God and Savior, Jesus Christ. And so two appearances very explicitly referred to or mentioned here by Paul in his letter. And what I am going to suggest or contend in a moment is that there's also what we could call a third appearing, but we're not going to identify that quite yet. Our consideration of the passage will be ordered by exploring what is said about each of these appearances. The two that we've identified even just a moment ago, the appearing of God's grace in the past, for the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. So the appearing or manifestation of God's grace in the past, but then also the appearing or manifestation of God's glory in the future. While we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. And then thirdly, the appearing or manifestation of, and I'm not going to tell you yet, but we'll come to that in due course, and that is in the present.

So in the past, in the future, and the intriguing third appearing in the present. So let's look at these each in turn. First of all, the appearing of God's grace in the past. In these verses, Paul speaks of that in verse 11 very explicitly, but then he picks up on that again in verse 14.

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. There, if it's necessary to establish or to make absolutely clear, we note that he is indeed speaking of something in the past. The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. This has already happened, says Paul. Now, we know as we discover what it is that he's referring to, and we'll touch on that or mention that in a moment, it's in the very immediate past, but nonetheless in the past. It's already happened. The grace of God has appeared, and it brings salvation. And then he picks up on that, on what was involved in this appearing as he describes Jesus Christ and what he has done there in verse 14, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own. And he goes on. Well, what are we told concerning the appearing of God's grace in the past? I think in considering this, we need to consider two aspects of this appearing of the grace of God. First of all, the nature of it, or if we want to put that in other words, how has God's grace appeared? But then secondly, the purpose of it, or why has God's grace appeared?

So, the nature of his appearing and the purpose of his appearing in the past, something that's already happened. Firstly, then, the nature of his appearing. Well, God's grace has appeared in the person of God's one and only Son, in the person of Jesus Christ. Now, Jesus is not explicitly mentioned in verse 11, where we're told of the grace of God appearing, the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. At that point, Paul doesn't say how this happened or who this involved, but it's very clear that when Jesus is mentioned in verse 13, he is being identified as both the one who will appear, which is Paul's concern at that point in that verse, but also as the one who has appeared. Because just as we've noticed in verse 14, Paul goes on to speak of what Jesus did at his first appearing. So, when we have at the very heart of these verses, this identification of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, the one who is being identified as the one who appeared in the past, as Paul states there in verse 11, but also the one who will appear in the future. But what can we say of this Jesus who is spoken of as the grace of God, the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. Well, consider how Paul describes him there in verse 13.

While we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, this expression or this description of the one who has appeared and the one who will appear, our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Now, this is an expression that has provoked and continues to generate considerable debate as to who Paul is referring to in the language he employs. Now, maybe you read it and you think, well, that's odd. What possible debate could these words provoke? Well, to sum it up very simply, and it is more complex than this, it boils down to whether Paul is to be understood as speaking of the Father and the Son, or if everything he says refers to the Son. So, if you just look at the expression there, you can maybe see how there could be some divergence of opinion as to what Paul is saying, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. So, our great God, a reference to the

[9 : 38] Father, it might be understood, and our Savior, Jesus Christ. And some suggest that this is what Paul is saying, but without waiting to enter into the nitty-gritty of that discussion, because it really probably isn't necessary at this point, I think there is a considerable reason to rather conclude that what Paul is doing and who Paul is identifying as the one who has appeared and the one who will appear is Jesus Christ, whom he describes very wonderfully as our great God and Savior, namely Jesus Christ, our great God and Savior, even Jesus Christ. This is the sense, I believe, of what Paul is saying here.

And there are a number of reasons for coming to that conclusion on the grounds of grammatical considerations, but perhaps especially and perhaps more significantly is the fact that in the New Testament, any reference to this future appearing, this second coming invariably concerns the return of Jesus Himself. We remember the words of the angels at His ascension, just to give one example, this same Jesus will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven. And so, when here we encounter Paul speaking of the appearing of Jesus Christ, it seems entirely reasonable to understand that the language that he uses is language describing the eternal Son, is describing Jesus Christ, whom he can describe in this way as our great God and Savior. And you can understand how significant it is to be clear on this, because if Paul is indeed speaking exclusively about Jesus, as we would argue that he is, then we are being given in this passage a hugely significant description of who Jesus is. He is, Paul contends, our great God, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Now, the divinity of Jesus is established, established and indeed assumed by the New Testament writers in a manner that is beyond any reasonable debate. But it is unusual, it is rare for Jesus to be identified in such an explicit manner as God in the way that He is on this occasion. He is, says Paul, our great God. And not only our great God, but our great God

God is, but our great God is, we are the great God. And not only our great God is, but our great God is, but our great God is to be the one who has been promised from ages past who would come and save His people from their sins. This is the one who has appeared in the past. This is the one whom Paul describes as the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. This is how God's grace has appeared in the person, of God's own Son, or as the language Paul employs, allows us to say, God has appeared in Jesus Christ. And of course, that's why Jesus was able to say to Philip in a manner that coincides perfectly with what Paul is saying here, as we have it recorded there in John chapter 14. Don't you know me, Philip? Even after I have been among you such a long time, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

So we can notice then that the nature of the appearing of the grace of God, it is in the person of Jesus Christ, our great God and Savior.

But Paul here also speaks of the purpose of His appearing. If we read verse 11, respecting the word order employed by Paul, it reads as follows.

[13 : 50] And here I'm simply taking from an alternative translation, the English Standard Version, that opts to translate what Paul says in the exact order in which he utilizes the words.

Now, that's not always what you need to do in translation, but on this occasion, I think it is helpful. And if we read it in that way, verse 11 would say this, The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all men.

So you can see there's a slight difference there. And the emphasis isn't so much on the appearing to all men, but on the appearing, bringing salvation. And this, of course, speaks to the purpose of His appearing.

The purpose of the appearing of Jesus Christ, of the grace of God, is to bring salvation for all men and women. All kinds of men, all over the world, from every nation, from every station, from every background, all invited to enjoy the salvation that He brings.

Jesus may have been born in a manger, but He did not come empty-handed. He came bearing gifts. He came bringing, bringing salvation.

[15 : 09] He came bearing the greatest gift of all. He came to secure for us our salvation. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all men.

But what does that mean? How did Jesus bring or secure salvation for His people? Well, verse 14 answers that question. We've already noticed how this appearing in the past is declared, identified in verse 11, but then what it involved is then further explained in verse 14.

And verse 14 indeed answers that question. How did Jesus bring or secure salvation for His people? Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good.

How did Jesus secure that salvation for us? How is this purpose of bringing salvation fulfilled?

Well, it's fulfilled, we're told, by His giving of Himself, by an atoning and substitutionary sacrifice. He gave Himself for us.

[16 : 30] He gave Himself for us. Where the for there, He gave Himself for us is to be understood not only in the sense of on our behalf, which is certainly true, but also in the sense of in our place.

He gave Himself for us. He died in our place. Jesus took the place that we deserved. He died in our place. This is how He secures our salvation.

And as Paul goes on, he explains to us that this death, this giving of Himself secures our redemption. Who gave Himself for us to redeem us, to redeem us.

And this redemption, in turn, as we see what Paul says, involves two intertwined aspects. We are redeemed from all wickedness, simply reading what we have there in the verse, who gave Himself for us, to redeem us from all wickedness.

So, redemption involves being freed from our wickedness and our sin and our slavery to sin. But also, we're redeemed for purity, redeemed from all wickedness to purify for Himself a people that are His very own.

[17 : 47] Or if we wanted to express that in other words, we could say that we are redeemed from slavery to sin, and we are redeemed for freedom from sin and for belonging in Christ, a people that are His very own.

So, this then is the first appearing, the appearing of the grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ, who came to secure salvation for all men.

The first appearing, the appearing of God's grace in the past. But then, we also want to look at this evening, the second appearing that is mentioned explicitly in our text, and that is the appearing of God's glory in the future.

The appearing of God's glory in the future. Now, perhaps before I go on to just talk about that for a moment, it's maybe worth recognizing that the division that we're making between these two appearings, or in any case, the manner in which we're describing them, the appearing of God's grace in the past and the appearing of God's glory in the future, though it's, I think, quite a neat way of dividing or identifying these two appearings.

We need to use the language a little carefully. And what do I mean by that? Well, what I mean by that is that we're not to imagine that in the past, in His appearing, there was only manifest the grace of God and nothing of His glory.

[19 : 23] And equally, in the future appearing that we await, it is not only glory that will be manifest, but grace also in both appearings. There is a manifestation of God's grace and His glory.

But recognizing that, it is the case that in one, that which predominates, in His appearing in the past, what predominates is the grace of God. Indeed, that's the language that Paul explicitly uses, for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.

And the one that we await is one where what will predominate, as we witness on that great day, is the glory of God, or as it's described here, the glorious appearing.

Though in a moment we'll make some comment on that expression. So that's simply to clarify. Though we can use these titles, we use them, I hope, carefully.

But moving on then to this second appearing, the appearing of God's glory in the future. There it's spoken of in verse 13. Paul says, While we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[20 : 40] In this verse, Paul speaks of another appearing, a future appearing that he and the believers are waiting for, that Titus is waiting for, that the believers in Crete are waiting for.

He uses that very language of while we wait, while we wait for the blessed hope. Indeed, it is an appearing that we also are waiting for.

Two thousand years have passed, and still we wait. Still God's people wait for this second appearing. It is the appearing, or the coming, that we read of.

There in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, where we're instructed to participate in the Lord's Supper until he comes, until he appears again. Well, what are we waiting for?

What is it that we are waiting for? What are we told here in these few words there in verse 13? What are we waiting for? Well, we're waiting for what's described as the blessed hope.

[21 : 44] While we wait for the blessed hope. Now, this blessed hope is not to be understood as something distinct from the appearing, but rather descriptive of the appearing.

And the manner in which it's punctuated aids us in that. We wait for the blessed hope, we might say, namely the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

But it's good to, if only fleetingly, focus on that language of this blessed hope that we are waiting for. The appearing of Jesus is a blessed hope for us.

It is that which we await with expectation. It is that which brings to us blessedness, even in the waiting for it. But Paul goes on.

We wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing. And what Paul says literally here is the blessed hope, the glory of our great God and Savior.

[22 : 47] Now, here there's another little debate, you might say, as to how best to translate what Paul says. And really, it revolves around the word that, in the original, refers to the word glory or glorious.

And the debate really revolves around whether we understand it as an adjective, as our version here does. And so, it speaks of the glorious appearing. And so, the word glory is understood to be a word that's describing something of the nature of this appearing.

It will be a glorious appearing. And that certainly is true. Or the word can be taken more literally as a noun. And in that case, the translation that we would have is along these lines.

The appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Now, as I've already mentioned, it is certainly true that the appearing of Jesus will be a glorious appearing.

But I think it is fair to suggest that Paul is here saying more than that. He's saying that the one who will appear is, in a real sense, the glory of God.

[23 : 55] We wait for Jesus, the glory of God manifested in the person of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So, we await our blessed hope, the blessed hope of this future appearing of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

So, we have a first appearing in the past, an appearing of the grace of God. But there's also that which we wait for, a second appearing in the future. But what about the present?

Given what we've said about that which has occurred in the past and that which is still awaiting in the future, do we have to conclude that, in some sense, God in Jesus is absent in the present?

You see, if there are these two openings, and in one, we know that He came, but then He returned to the Father. And if the second appearing is yet a future appearing, it has not happened yet, where does that leave us, stuck in the middle, if I can use that language?

[25 : 09] Jesus appeared to bring or secure our salvation, but then He returned. He will return again, appear again in glory. But what about now? Do we just wait?

We're told that we wait. Is that all we do? Do we just wait? Now, I think it is, or it can be said very reasonably and legitimately, that Jesus is present in the here and now in a number of ways.

Jesus is present in the gospel and in our proclamation of the gospel in that way. He is very present in the here and now. Perhaps even more significantly, or together with that, He is present by His Spirit.

He is present by His Spirit in His church and in us as His disciples. And so, in a very real way, He is present in the here and now. But what I want to do this evening is to suggest how Jesus Christ, our great God and Savior, is present in the present in what we might call, or what we're going to call, a third appearing, to simply borrow the language that Paul is using here.

And what I want to suggest is, and we'll seek to substantiate that from these verses, is that we have an appearing of God in and through His people in the present.

[26 : 35] That there's a very real way in which God appears in and through us. A very real way in which Jesus Christ appears or is made manifest in His own people, His very own, as we are described in this beautiful and tender and covenantal language.

Now, to take a step back before we justify this claim, it's important to notice that in this letter that Paul writes to Titus, he is concerned to stress the need for Christians to be visible by the lives that they live.

Lives that will be seen by others and will serve, if they are lived as they ought to be lived, to attract others to the gospel, to the grace of God, to Jesus.

If we just notice, time doesn't allow us to think about the different ways in which that is clear in the letter, but if we just notice the immediately preceding verse, or two verses to the passage that we're looking at.

And Paul is treating what might seem a mundane subject of how slaves are to behave vis-à-vis their masters. Indeed, even the very idea of such teaching we maybe find a little bit difficult.

[27 : 53] But notice what he says in this instruction. Teach slaves to be subject to their masters and everything. This is in verse 9. To try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted.

And then notice what Paul says. So that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive. Now, isn't this remarkable what Paul is saying?

He's saying, here we have these slaves. And we might think that their natural inclination would be to resent their circumstances, and you might say they would have good reason to. And yet, what are they told to do?

They're told to be subject to their masters, to try to please them, to not talk back to them, to show that they can be fully trusted. But why? Why are they to do all these things?

So that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive. Their purpose, their reason for being as believers is to draw others, to make the gospel attractive, to draw even their masters, perhaps especially their masters in the case of these servants or slaves, to draw them to their Savior.

[29 : 09] So the master sees this slave and he says, well, I can't get my head around this. Here I have this slave. And he's so respectful and he's so obedient and he's subject and he never steals anything and he never lies.

How can it be? You know, what is the explanation that the slave behaves in this way? And then the light goes on and it clicks. And he says, well, it must have something to do with this Jesus that he's always on about or that he worships.

And so he is drawn, the master is drawn by the attitude and behavior of his slave. Now, I mentioned this simply to establish that this is Paul's great concern.

He's exhorting believers to holy living, but with this purpose, that in so living they would draw others and make the gospel attractive.

Which allows us to come back to this suggestion that there is in the present an appearing of God, a manifestation of God, a manifestation of Jesus Christ in and through the lives of his people.

[30 : 18] And, well, how does that happen? How do we manifest Jesus? Or do we manifest Jesus? Well, we do or we will in the measure that we are the objects of his saving work in our lives as described in verse 12 of our passage.

The verse speaks of how the grace of God, because that is still the subject of the sentence, for the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, it teaches us to say, it refers back to the grace of God.

We're told that the grace of God teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age.

The verse speaks of how the grace of God teaches us, and this teaching is an integral element of our salvation. Interestingly, this teaching reflects or echoes the twofold aspect of our redemption that we've already noted.

Remember that we noted that our redemption involved being redeemed from slavery to sin and being redeemed for freedom in Christ. Well, this is echoed in this ethical teaching that is part and parcel of our salvation.

[31 : 34] We are, on the one hand, to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and we don't have time to delve into all that that would involve. It is, I think, very clear, the teaching there, to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions on the one hand, but also to say yes or to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

Now, in the measure that we are taught by the grace of God, in the measure that we learn and practice or live out what we are taught, in that measure we are purified by and for Jesus, and in that measure we become ever more visibly a people that are his very own.

We are his very own, even if we stubbornly resist the teaching that we are given, but we become more visibly a people that are his very own. We become more attractively and more winsomely a people that are his very own, as we are taught and as we learn and as we practice.

We begin to bear more and more the family likeness we think and speak and behave, ever more like Jesus. And others see, and what do they see? They see, in some measure, they see Jesus.

And so, in his people, in the present, that Jesus is made manifest. Jesus appears. Now, maybe one question that we might have as we ponder on that is, but do they?

[33 : 15] Do people really see? Are people even looking? Don't we live in a city here in Aberdeen that really couldn't care less about how we live and whether we manifest Jesus or not?

Is it not the case that we don't live in a very promising generation or in a very promising location for this kind of manifesting of Jesus?

Well, if that's something that concerns us, well, it's good if it concerns us, but perhaps to encourage us, just think on this. Was Crete any more promising than Aberdeen?

Notice how Paul describes Crete. Now, the language he uses is horrendously politically incorrect. You know, he'd probably get arrested for hate crimes if he were to speak like that today.

But listen to what he says, describing the milieu, the community in which the believers who are being exhorted to manifest Jesus live.

[34 : 16] Verse 12, Even one of their own prophets has said, so he's quoting, some Cretan writer, prophet, describing his own people. It's always a bit easier when you're insulting your own people.

You can get away with it a little bit more. And what does that man say? Well, he says, Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. It's not very flattering language that he employs.

Well, if Paul had left it there, you might have said, well, okay. You know, he's keeping some kind of distance. That's what others say. But that's not where he stops. In verse 13, he says, this testimony is true.

Well, as I say, it's not very flattering of the good citizens of Crete. And if anybody here is from Crete, well, I'm sure you've moved on and we can all change. It's probably not an unfair description of many people in many different parts of the world.

The point I'm making is this, that it didn't seem a very promising place to witness for Jesus. It didn't seem very likely that these people so described would be looking at the Christians, at how they lived, and being attracted to the gospel.

[35 : 18] But Paul says, yes, they will be. They will be. This is the manner in which you can manifest Jesus and make Jesus attractive by how you live.

As God's redeemed people, as those who have tasted of His grace and look forward to beholding His glory, we must and we can and we ought to manifest Jesus in the present.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You for what it tells us of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. We thank You that He is indeed the one who appeared in the past, in history.

He came into this world and He secured our salvation. And we thank You that we live as those who wait for His new appearing, for a future appearing, for that blessed hope of the glory, of the appearing of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And as we wait, as we live in the present age, we pray that our wait would not be a passive one, that we would not just wait, but that we would be taught, that we would be instructed as this passage speaks, and that as we are taught and as we learn and as we are transformed and as we are purified, so we would, even with the slaves and servants in Crete, so commend the gospel, so make a tract of the gospel, that others would be drawn to it and to Yourself and to Your Son, Jesus Christ.

[37 : 02] And these things we pray in His name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.