

Titus 1

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[0 : 0 0] As we come to this small part of a big book, we are pointed to the powerful truths concerning the person of Jesus Christ and what he has come to do and what he has done and is doing.

We often speak of the finished work of Jesus, by which we refer to those words that Jesus spoke on the cross, it is finished or paid in full.

So that sacrifice that he made is a once for all sacrifice. But what scripture often reminds us is that the work of Jesus is an ongoing work. It's an ongoing work in this world that he continues to work.

It's an ongoing work in the lives of his people because we're told that he commences a work, he continues a work, and he brings a work to his intended conclusion.

So if you're a Christian this evening and you find the going difficult and you find that your grasp of Jesus might seem quite weak, one encouragement is to remind yourself that his grasp of you is quite strong.

[1 : 1 4] I mentioned this morning John Wesley, John Wesley is quite a remarkable character and one of the heroes that I have in the faith. And John Wesley, very soon after his conversion, he said he described the world now as his parish.

He didn't have a fixed pulpit, but he traveled. He traveled an estimated 250,000 miles on horseback or on foot. And he would travel anywhere and everywhere.

And he kept a journal and there's an entry in his journal, it was 1742, and it was his first trip to Newcastle. I don't know if you've ever been to Newcastle. I haven't yet been through Newcastle on the train.

I've never actually been to Newcastle. But if I do go to Newcastle, I want to go to this particular district that he describes. So in his journal, he said this way, he says, We came to Newcastle about six, and after a short refreshment walked into the town.

I was surprised. So much drunkenness, cursing and swearing, even from the mouths of little children. Do I never remember to have seen and heard before in so small a compass of time.

[2 : 2 2] Surely this place is ripe for him who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. It's an interesting perspective, isn't it?

Because we might draw the same conclusion, we might see the same things, but we might draw a very different conclusion. We might hear the swearing, we might observe the drunkenness, we might observe the character and quality of the lifestyle of people, and we might conclude that, yes, this place is ripe, but is ripe for judgment or ripe for condemnation.

But Wesley felt, here's a place that needs the gospel. These are people who sin and need to be saved. And the Apostle Paul is saying to Titus, Titus, you're going to a place where the one thing that they need for sure is the message of Jesus.

So Wesley arrives in town on the Friday night, and seven o'clock on Sunday morning, he says this. He says, At seven, I walked down to Sandgate, the poorest and most contemptible part of the town, and standing at the end of the street with John Taylor, began to sing the hundredth psalm.

Three or four people came out to see what was the matter, who soon increased to four or five hundred. I suppose there might be twelve or fifteen hundred before I had done preaching. To whom I applied those solemn words, he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.

[3 : 50] Observing the people when I had done, to stand gaping and staring upon me with the most profound astonishment, I told them, if you desire to know who I am, my name is John Wesley. At five in the evening, with God's help, I designed to preach here again.

At five, the hill on which I designed to preach was covered from top to bottom. I never saw a so large a number of people together, either in Moorfields or at Kennington Common.

God can do great and mighty things through ordinary people. Through ordinary people who proclaim and profess faith in the extraordinary Savior Jesus.

Because John Wesley was not looking for good people so that the gospel could make them better. And the Apostle Paul is not saying to Titus, find within this group of Cretans some exceptional characters that you might be able to improve.

No. The gospel comes to real people with real problems. Comes to people who are described here in the opening chapter of Titus very simply. Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.

[4 : 53] You're not going to find that on the tourist brochures. You're not going to find that as the strap line of come visit Crete. And we're never going to describe ourselves in those terms.

But this is how God sees people. And notice the contrast. The Cretans are always lying. But what about God? We're told that God is one who does not lie in verse 2.

That his promises are always steadfast and true. So we don't worry when we see rebellion or sin or evil. In fact, we, like John Wesley, could rejoice because we could say, well, obviously God has placed us in the right place.

And God places Titus in Crete. And maybe today, this moment, God has placed you here. Not just in Bonacord Free Church, but he's placed you in Aberdeen.

Or he's placed you in your place of work or your place of study. And you might be quite shocked and quite surprised or quite disheartened by the lifestyles of people. What they say and what they do.

[5 : 56] But if you think of it this way. Jesus came not to call the righteous. He came to call sinners. And when you think of it that way, we're surrounded by sinners.

We're surrounded by people who need salvation. We're surrounded by just the kind of people that Jesus came to help. And that's why when John Wesley has this crowd in the Sandgate in Newcastle, what does he speak on?

He speaks on the one who was wounded. He speaks on the one who died. He speaks on the one who was pierced. He speaks on the one who died so that they might live and have eternal life.

So when we consider the setting, it's a very unpromising setting. There are divisions within the church. There are different groups and different parties.

There are people who are sowing the seeds of dissension. There's the character and the characteristics of the people of Crete. And you might be tempted to give up before you even start.

[6 : 55] And sometimes we do give up before we even start. We find the difficulties too many. We find the resources too few. And we look at ourselves and we say, I'm just an ordinary person.

I don't have much ability. I don't have much skill. And sometimes when we consider a person like John Wesley, who was quite an extraordinary character, we look at somebody like that and we say, well, good enough for him, but not for me.

Let me at least introduce you to one other character from history. This is on the other side of the Atlantic. I have to say I'm biased towards the United States. I've been told that I don't need to say that that's where I'm from.

But when I go back to America now, people say that I'm developing a Scottish accent. So if my Scottish accent is so far developed that you don't realize that I am from the United States. And at the time, about 150 years ago, there was a man called D.L. Moody.

And Moody once said this. He said, if the world is going to be reached, I'm convinced that it must be done by men and women of average talent. After all, there are comparatively few people in the world who have great talent.

[8 : 07] Now, D.L. Moody was educated to the age of about fourth grade, which is, I guess, P5 here, 10 or so. So he had a fourth grade education.

He was not a particularly skilled speaker. However, his accent was very strong, much stronger than mine. His pronunciation was unique. He actually was quite reluctant to speak in public.

He would much rather others speak. He was great at gathering people. So he would have a Sunday school in Chicago. And he would gather hundreds of children together and get somebody else to speak to them about Jesus.

But strangely, he had a profound encounter with God and was persuaded that God was calling him to preach the gospel to all people. And this man with a very average or less than average education, he was not the great intellect like Charles Spurgeon was.

Though Spurgeon and Moody became great friends. But by the end of Moody's life, it was estimated. You see, he had this desire. He said, every day I want to tell somebody about Jesus. And it was estimated that he led personally about 70,000 people to faith.

[9 : 16] Just through a one-to-one conversation. Just talking with them about Jesus. And for the person who was reluctant to preach by the end of his life, again it was estimated, that he spoke in person to over 100 million people.

Quite a feat for someone with a fourth grade education. We don't know much about Titus. We know a bit more about the Apostle Paul. I know some of you, and I know myself a little bit.

And we look at ourselves and we see, I can't. I don't have much ability. I don't have much eloquence. I don't have much education. I don't have much experience. And the situation in which I find myself in is difficult.

And the people I encounter are complex. And the problems that I encounter are very difficult. So you look at the setting, and instead of giving up, what does the Apostle Paul do?

He tells Titus two profound truths. He tells him first about Jesus, and he tells him secondly about the Holy Spirit. So the setting is not promising.

[10 : 22] Liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. And in fact, the shorthand in verse 16, in verse chapter 1, is this. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good.

As you read through Titus, at least five times, this idea of doing good works is emphasized. And what Paul is saying is these people are unfit.

They are called to do good, but they are unfit for doing good. Why? Because their character, because their actions, because their mindset. They are unfit for doing the work that they are required to do.

And then we come to chapter 2 in verse 11, where we began our second reading. And the Apostle Paul tells Titus, and again, this is kind of like one of those Sunday school answers, that, you know, whatever the question, the answer is Jesus.

But really, the answer is Jesus. The answer is, look at verse 11 and see where we now find ourselves. Because sometimes we think of ourselves and we think, well, where am I?

[11 : 25] I'm in Aberdeen. What's the date? It's 2020. What's the atmosphere? What's society like? And you think, well, society is hostile. What are people like? Well, either people are indifferent, uninterested, or hostile themselves towards the gospel.

Whereas the Apostle Paul says, Titus, no. What you need to think of is not the place where you're at or the society of which you're part of, but he gives him a time frame or bookends to understand where he finds himself.

So the first bookend in chapter 2, verse 11, for the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. This is a game changer.

Jesus Christ comes into this world. He appears. We call this the incarnation. We call this the first coming of Jesus. And the arrival of Jesus now brings salvation.

Now brings the welcome mat. It now says the doors are wide open. Whoever you are, wherever you're from, whatever your culture, whatever your background, the coming of Jesus opens wide the gate, and the welcome mat is out.

[12 : 30] You are invited. It brings salvation to all people. So that's the first bookend. We live in the light of the coming of Jesus. Our individual circumstances, important as they are, are secondary.

The arrival of Jesus brings salvation to people, all people. And notice here there's no qualification. In the Bible, in Greek, all means all.

All kinds of people, all kinds of backgrounds, all kinds of problems, all kinds of misunderstandings, all kinds of difficulties. But in verse 12 of chapter 2, the apostle Paul says it teaches us.

So Paul's use of pronouns in these small words are very important because he says the gospel brings hope to all, but the gospel only can transform the us.

There's a subgroup here. There's those who hear and those who respond. There's those who are invited and those who accept. So this evening, if you are one of the us, the gospel has come to all people and we respond to the gospel in faith and repentance.

[13 : 36] You believe and you turn. You believe in and you turn from sin. And therefore now, verse 12 says, we have the ability to say no and to say yes.

We have the ability to say no to that which is ungodly and to that which is characteristic of the passions of this world. That which we previously would say yes to. You see, the gospel changes our desires, changes our motivations, and changes us from the inside out.

So you see, Titus, you are not called to kind of educate or to correct or to somehow make the Cretans a little bit more respectable.

No. What you are called to do is to present them the grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ and let him do the work. Let him make the change and let him transform people from the inside out.

So if you're a Christian here tonight, you're now able to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. And again, these are big words or catch-all words. Anything that we know about God, the absence of that is ungodliness.

[14 : 44] God is honest and true. We tend to lie. God is pure. We tend to move in the direction of impurity. Whatever we know about God, ungodliness is the opposite.

And whatever this world is offering us is a way of thinking, a way of understanding, and a way of living that is contrary to God. So you see, the Christian life is saying no and saying yes.

And to say yes now to self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age. So you see, we live in the light of what Jesus has done.

He's come. We live today. We don't live in the past. We live in this present age, in this present place. We say yes to what is pleasing. We say no to what is displeasing.

And then Paul brings that second bookend while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. So if you think of bookends, if you have a bookshelf or a line of books, if you have two solid bookends, no matter how heavy those books are, they're going to be held in place because the bookends are solid.

[15 : 52] And the solid bookends that we have in the Christian life are the arrival of Jesus and the return of Jesus. That's a past event and a future event. We live the present in light of those two realities, what he has done and what he will do.

And if you're looking for a verse in the Bible that describes Jesus as God, you've got it here. Titus 2.13 is one of those verses that says Jesus is God. So if somebody comes to you and says, well, actually, the Bible never says Jesus is God, Titus 2.13 says it.

Our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. But you see, if you don't have the bookends, you know, if you're trying to balance a shelf full of books and they're not propped up, the books easily fall over one side to the other.

And if our lives are not held up, we easily fall over from one side to another. Because otherwise, we either rely upon our own resources, which are limited.

We rely upon what we find within the culture of the society. And we're already told that the culture and society are contrary to what we believe. But if our lives are now held up by the coming of Jesus and by the return of Jesus, we're secure.

[17 : 01] And we have confidence to say yes and to say no. And who is this Jesus? So Jesus is our great God and Savior. That's his identity.

But notice that verse 14 tells us he's done something. Who gave himself for us. Again, the all in us. He's come to bring salvation to all.

But the benefit belongs to the us who have responded to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own eager to do what is good.

Remember the Cretans were unfit for doing anything that was good? Unfit, unqualified for good works? And now Paul is saying, the gospel takes those who are unfit and makes them fit.

The gospel that makes that people who are uninterested, they now become eager to do what is good. And again, doing what is good is a big word. Or a big phrase.

[18 : 01] It's everything that fits the gospel. It's everything that commends Jesus. It's everything that speaks of that changed life. The life that now says yes to that which pleases God.

And that says no to that which displeases God. Doing what is good is putting that kind of life and that kind of faith into practice. You put that life into practice at home.

You put that life into practice where you work. You put that life into practice with your friends. So that not only do they see what you're not doing, but they see what you do.

They see what you're not saying, or they hear what you're not saying, but they also hear what you are saying. And you see, we're not just commended for not doing the wrong. We are exhorted to do that which is good, beneficial, helpful, encouraging, building up, whatever that might be.

And now we move from the setting, which is not promising. We now have these two great bookends for our lives, the arrival of Jesus and the return of Jesus. And then the Apostle Paul begins to dig deeper and show us what's at work now in the lives of the Cretans, what's at work in his life, Paul's life, and in Titus' life.

[19 : 15] And it reminds us of what God can do in us and through us. In chapter 3, in verse 3, and this is quite remarkable, in verse 3 he says, at one time, we too, yes, Titus, you and me, we were just like them.

We were no better. We just, we thought the way they thought. We acted the way they acted. We did the things they did. And you see what the gospel does, is the gospel changes us, but the gospel enables us to identify with people, real people, because we recognize that we are not what we once were, but whatever the change is, has occurred not because of us, but because of God.

So Paul can say, we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved, by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

There was a prayer of a long dead slave in the United States, and she put it this way. She said, Oh Lord, I ain't what I ought to be. Oh Lord, I ain't what I want to be.

And oh Lord, I ain't what I'm gonna be. But thanks Lord, I ain't what I used to be. Amen. And every Christian, every believer can say that. We're not what we want to be, yet.

[20 : 36] We're not what we ought to be. We're certainly not what we're gonna be. But if you've had a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ, you are not what you once were. And for that, we give God the praise, and we give God the thanks.

Because it's he who has made that change within our lives. So you see, Paul and Titus not only want to know what's going on in Crete, they want to understand their audience, they identify with their audience because they realize that apart from God's grace, apart from the gospel, they are exactly the same.

And we are exactly the same. The only difference, of course, is that many of us have the ability of looking respectable. We can avoid certain obvious sins, and sometimes we can distinguish ourselves and think we're a little bit better than others because we have a level of success in so doing.

But Paul says, no, make no mistake, Titus, we were in the same boat. We had the same problems. We had the same character. We had the same lifestyle. And whatever your audience, we are exactly where we once were, where they are.

And in verse 4, Isn't that remarkable? Of all the various qualities and characteristics, kindness and love. If Jesus' two qualities that are highlighted here, because you would think to such an audience, malice, envy, hatred, passions, pleasures, deceived, disobedient, foolish, enslaved, you would think, what would that prompt?

[22 : 15] Anger or annoyance or judgment, kindness and love. How do we treat people in these categories? How do we treat people who were like the Cretans, who were like what we once were?

Are we judgmental? Do we have condemnation? Do we look down and reject? Or do we articulate and demonstrate kindness and love?

In the ancient world, in the original Greek language, the word kind and the word Christ look very similar and sound very similar.

So that you could say the word *crestus* and could easily be misinterpreted. So one thing that was interesting in the first century was that the Christian community, which were being described as Christ's people, some people misunderstood and thought that they were being described as the kind ones.

And the quality of their lifestyle was such that that was a valid description. That, yes, what was meant to be said was Christ, that they were those who belonged to Christ, but that misunderstanding or that slight mishearing, that these were described as kind people.

[23 : 33] And that was characteristic of the Christian community. They were kind. Husbands were kind to their wives. Wives were kind to their husbands. Parents were kind to their children. People were kind to the poor.

People were kind to outsiders. People were kind to people outside of their circle. Wouldn't that be a great testimony that people might not understand what we believe, but they would say, there's something about these people.

They're kind. They're caring. They're interested. They're thoughtful. They seem to demonstrate real concern for others. But when the kindness and love of God, our Savior, appeared, He saved us.

And if you didn't get that in verse 5, at the beginning of verse 5, you get it at the end of verse 5. So when the Scriptures repeat something, they repeat it for a reason. He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His great mercy.

He saved us, same words, through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Rebirth and renewal. You must be born again, Jesus said.

[24 : 38] Nicodemus' human effort doesn't do it. Human respectability, human religion, whatever you do does not meet the standards. But when the Holy Spirit works, watch out.

Because this word, rebirth, it's really, it's a hard word to capture, but it's a word that speaks about regeneration. It occurs only one other place in the Bible, and I'll read it to you.

It's in Matthew chapter 19, in verse 28. And Jesus said to them, Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, at the regeneration of all things, at the rebirth of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

So Jesus is looking forward to the new heavens, the new earth, everything made new. And Paul is saying this same word applies to the individual believer in God.

That what God will do cosmically in this world, God will do personally and individually in your life. That He will regenerate you. He will make you new all over.

[25 : 45] And this word regeneration is followed by renewal, which means a change for the better in every aspect of your life. A change in the way you think. A change in the way you feel.

A change in the way you act. A change in the way you react. A change in everything. And that's what the Holy Spirit does within us. And doesn't it begin to make sense now, or doesn't it begin to fit together, that the Apostle Paul is not commissioning Titus, because Titus is exceptional in one way or another.

He's not sending him to Crete, because the Cretans are demonstrating qualities and characteristics that make it seem likely that the gospel might take root there. But what he is doing is he's saying, Titus, you have the gospel.

You have the gospel of Jesus Christ, and you have the promise of the Holy Spirit, because when the Holy Spirit works, he changes people completely for the better.

So he changes the Cretans completely for the better. He changes people from Aberdeen. He changes people from the cities, and from the towns, and from the villages, from the highlands, from the islands, from the rural communities.

[26 : 53] But he changes them from within. And he pours the Holy Spirit on us generously through Jesus Christ, our Savior, so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Hope. If there's one thing today I think that people lack, is hope. Things seem bad. Things seem like they're going to get worse.

You don't need much news to be depressed, to be disheartened, to be discouraged. The global picture is not that bright. The economic picture is filled with uncertainties.

Political sphere. Wherever you look. But we're told here that we have the hope of eternal life. That we have a message of hope.

And we have a message of hope that gives to us the ability to look beyond our circumstances, and to look beyond our situations. And the Apostle Paul closes this passage, you see five times in these three letters, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, he uses this phrase, this is a trustworthy saying.

[28 : 05] And I want to stress these things. It's kind of a way of highlighting. You know, if you study students, you might use a highlighter, and you're reading through your text, and you would come across an important passage. You use a highlighter.

Why? Because you know you want to come back to it. So this is the Apostle Paul using a technique to say, highlight this verse. Highlight 3.8. This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God, if you're a Christian tonight, you're in that category.

You and I who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. Notice the movement here. Unfit for doing anything good. Now eager, chapter 2, verse 14, eager to do what is good.

And now 3.8, devoted to doing what is good. Now for some, that might mean speaking, or preaching, or teaching. But not all. Not all are called to preach and teach.

But all who are called by Jesus are called to demonstrate something good, something beneficial, something kind, something caring, something compassionate. So you see, Paul doesn't give you a list, but he says there are things that are good.

[29 : 15] Whatever those things are, do them. There are words that are good. Whatever those words are, speak them. There's a motivation that is good. There's a mindset that's good.

There's a desire that is good. Whatever fits that category of good. Whatever fits that category of godly. Whatever looks like the person of Jesus. Whatever he would say.

Whatever he would do. When you begin to put into practice your faith, watch out. Because people will see. They will see kindness. They will hear words of kindness and see actions of kindness.

They will see a life that is characterized by hope and not despair. Characterized by love and not hate. And they'll see a change. They'll say there's something different about him.

I knew him before and he was much different. Or there's something different about them. They act differently. They speak differently. They engage with people differently. They even deal with difficult things.

[30 : 13] Death or illness or whatever it might be. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. When the grace of God takes root in the life of a person, watch out.

When the grace of God takes root in the life of a congregation, watch out. Because God can take us, ordinary people, and do extraordinary things. Why? Because we have the extraordinary power of Jesus.

The extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit that they work in us to work through us. So that it's not about us. But it becomes all about Jesus. Who he is and what he has done.

His work. His finished work. It becomes all about what the Holy Spirit does in us and does through us. Now if the gospel can take root in Crete, and it did.

And if the gospel can take root there, it can take root anywhere. And if we're honest, if the gospel can take root in our lives, it can take place, it can take root in anyone's life. If we realize what we once were or what we are by our nature.

[31 : 15] So we have confidence that's not found in ourselves, thankfully. But we have confidence in the God who cannot lie. We have confidence in the gospel that cannot fail.

And we have confidence in the Holy Spirit who takes us, renews us, regenerates us, and gives us hope. That is our commission. That is our calling.

That is our challenge. That is our opportunity. Ordinary people. An extraordinary gospel concerning an extraordinary savior. Can the church take root in hard places?

Absolutely. Because the gospel has taken root in a very hard place. My human heart and your human heart. And what he has done in us, watch what he can do in the lives of others.

But we need to tell. We need to share. And I think above all, maybe we need to show. That's why we are now eager to do what is good. That's why we are now to be devoted to do what is good.

[32 : 11] These things are profitable and excellent for everyone. Amen. Let's pray. Father, hear us. We're weak.

We're fragile. We're inconsistent. And yet, Lord, you are powerful. And you are ever sure, reliable and steadfast. Lord, work in us, we pray.

Work through us, we ask. Enable us to be a people who respond to Jesus. And enable us to be a people who do that which is good. For any here tonight who might not yet be persuaded, who might not yet be trusting, enable them to recognize that the grace of God that brings salvation has indeed appeared to all.

And that Jesus has come, not for the good, but for the bad, not for the success, but for the failures. And that he's come to give life, he's come to give light, and he's come to give hope.

So for any here tonight who feel in darkness, who feel in despair, and who feel as if they failed, may they find in Jesus one who meets them exactly where they are, but who never leaves them where he finds them.

[33 : 19] As we pray these things, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.