

Titus 3:1-11

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[0 : 00] You can find that on page 1199 of the Bibles in front of you. Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life.

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. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time.

After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful. They are self-condemned. Amen. Well, thank you very much indeed for that reading, and thank you for your warm welcome this evening.

[1 : 57] It's great to be here. What an opportunity to hear from Callum this evening and from others this morning about the work of God in his and their lives, and to witness them responding to God's wonderful promises for them and providing us with the opportunity to pray for him tonight and for the others earlier today.

Well, I've picked this passage from Titus 3 because it explains very helpfully why it is that, to use the analogy that Tim was talking about, going up the Hudson to that Liberty statue, why it is that God brings people to that point, how does he do it, and to what end does he do it?

Why does God save people? How does he save them, and to what end? Well, Paul is writing this letter to Titus, whom he has left in the island of Crete, chapter 1, verse 5.

Paul is traveling on to Macedonia, but he leaves Titus in Crete, that you might put in order what has been left unfinished, and appoint elders in every town, as I, Paul, directed you, and to the churches that he was serving across the island.

And part of Paul's concern was to ensure that there were godly, competent pastor-teachers in place in the churches, so that the church members were well-disciplined in the Word of God, rather than, as we see in verses 9 and 10 of our passage in chapter 3, being led away by false teachers into foolish controversies, which lead people into unprofitable and worthless directions.

[3 : 49] Well, the fruit of godly, competent ministry in these Cretan churches would be Christians living godly and productive lives.

So, as we come now to this passage to look at it in more detail, let us pray to God for godliness in and the competent preaching of this particular preacher with the resulting fruits that the members here at St. Silas' this evening will be built up for tonight and for the days ahead.

So, let's pray to God. Almighty God and our gracious Heavenly Father, we pray that your Holy Spirit would be our teacher this evening as we look at these verses and that you would do your work in me and in each one of us to your praise and to your glory.

For we ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen. Now, I understand that there is a habit in St. Silas of allowing Bibles to fall closed.

So, you might like to make sure that you're open and on page 1199 so that you can follow on with what I'm saying and make sure that what I say is in line with what Scripture says.

[5 : 10] Paul begins chapter 3 and the chapter division was not part of his original letter reminding Titus and through him the believers in the churches something that signifies that this was not new to them of the conduct that befits a believer in the context of the non-Christian world.

Remind them that's the Christians in the congregations to be submissive to rulers and authorities to be obedient to be ready for every good work which is a major focus of this short letter to speak evil of no one to avoid quarreling to be gentle to show perfect courtesy towards all people.

Well the question emerges why should Christians behave like this in a world that does not really appreciate the contribution of Christians and frankly doesn't deserve it?

Well this leads Paul to one of his five trustworthy sayings. We heard one earlier just before we confessed our sins and as Tim pointed out we've got another one this evening.

And there are five of them found in these pastoral letters of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus here in chapter 3 verse 8. The saying is trustworthy and I want you Titus to insist on these things so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

[6 : 43] These things are excellent and profitable for people. these trustworthy sayings are like signposts highlighting important things that Paul wanted to ensure were taught in these churches.

They are a bit like the truly truly sayings of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. So let's dig into our passage and ask first why does God save?

Why does God save? Verses 3 to 5. For we ourselves were once foolish disobedient led astray slaves to various passions and pleasures passing our days in malice and envy hated by others and hating one another.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared he saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness but according to his own mercy.

Paul moves from talking in the third person in verses 1 and 2 to the much more personal we in verse 3. And thus he includes himself Titus and the church members in what he's talking about.

[7 : 57] Back in chapter 1 Paul had not minced his words about what the Cretans were like. He says this in verses 12 and 13 one of Crete's own prophets has said Cretans are always liars evil brutes lazy gluttons.

This saying is true he goes on to say therefore rebuke them sharply so that they will be sound in the faith. But here in chapter 3 he's at pains to indicate his own solidarity with general humanity.

And two things to say there are about this pretty negative assessment of humanity in our natural state. The first is this we need to be saved. Verse 5 begins with those key words he saved us.

I still have vivid memories of being rescued from drowning in the 1960s when I was being carried out to sea by the tide. I needed a rescuer because I was beyond the limits of my own resources.

I now have a bronze medal for life saving in swimming though it has not been retested since the mid 1970s so I wouldn't put too much confidence in any rescue that I would be called upon to perform in such a thing as the pool in front of me this evening.

[9 : 28] When I took that test though it involved rescuing someone else who was acting out a situation where they were unable to save themselves and we were often taught that the person being rescued might actually fight against the one rescuing them and actually endanger the rescuer so that we might actually have to break away and stand back for a bit until they had calmed down or perhaps drowned.

Well Paul here describes the natural condition of all humanity foolish disobedient to God led astray deceived slaves passing our days hated and hating the phrase slaves to various passions and pleasures is indicative of this helplessness a slave is by nature unable to control their own destiny they are helpless they need external help that had happened to Paul who was engaged in the murderous pursuit of Christians when Christ appeared to him and said Saul Saul why do you persecute me there was no indication that Saul could do anything to save himself and so it is with us we need to be saved secondly we contribute nothing to our salvation back to those wonderful words at the beginning of verse 5 he saved us before immediately stating not because of works done by us in righteousness well this is consistent with the scriptural witness elsewhere and is directly contrary to our own instincts one notable figure who may be recognized in what I'm about to say in the world today said that he was at the back of the line that was a quote and at the bottom of the totem pole for heaven meaning that he was self aware and he recognized certain weaknesses and failings on his part but he then goes on to say but I'll get there I'm at the bottom of the pole the back of the line I'm at the bottom of the totem pole for heaven but I'll get there that last

little phrase is stating that he is still an agent in his mind in his own eternal destiny in his eventual entry contrary to biblical truth that we contribute nothing which is what Titus is saying or Paul is saying to Titus admitting that we need to be saved and that we contribute nothing to our salvation is deeply humbling to our pride it also means that like

Paul we admit to God and to each other and to others that we've not got it all together sometimes we in churches can come give the impression to people who may be visiting or looking in from outside that somehow we think we've got it all together well we haven't and one of the glorious things about the regular confession of our sins is that people around us hear us if we're sincere declaring that we haven't got it all together my mother who was not a Christian at the time said to me and would point out when I became a Christian you call yourself a Christian and yet you and you can fill in the words after that to which I learnt very soon that my best response was yeah that is why I am a Christian because I do do those things and I desperately recognise my need of a saviour so we've not got it all together we ourselves need to be rescued from our helpless slavery there is no room for proud boasting

Callum I'm sure this evening that you've been recognising that that is true of you we are utterly dependent upon God to do everything but why should he do anything given that we are so utterly undeserving well the wonderful words in verses four and five but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our saviour appeared he saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness but according to his own mercy let's not lose the unusual way Paul puts it there he personifies the goodness and loving kindness of God our saviour appearing we as has been shown were helpless enslaved undeserving but our salvation appeared in the person of Jesus acting in goodness and loving kindness why according as it says here to his own mercy no one has a right to claim mercy which is

[14 : 44] God's loving compassion that moves him to rescue and to forgive demonstrated supremely in Jesus as he talks about the father dealing with his prodigal son who had gone and spent everything profligately on his own pleasures elsewhere in Paul's writings after a similarly damning verdict on humanity he says but because of his great love for us God who is rich in mercy that is the basis that we come before our holy God because we know that he is rich in mercy he made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions when we know and can count on such a merciful God who is also so disposed towards us we can approach him with the confidence as Hebrew shows us let us then approach

God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need so we've seen our need our lack of deserving our helplessness to contribute anything and we've seen that God acts out of his mercy which is a rock solid part of his character he's utterly dependable in this but what then does he do verse 5 he saved us but how did he save us verses 5 to 7 by washing the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life we needed and we need to be washed because we were and are dirty we need to be reborn and renewed because we were dead and we need to be justified we need to be made right with

God all that happens when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared that was where God demonstrated his merciful intent and in raising the Lord Jesus from the dead he showed the efficacy of his death on our behalf giving us the benefits of Christ's suffering and passion how does this fit with what we've been doing today in the baptisms and confirmations this morning and a further baptism of Callum this evening well baptism is what is referred to as a sacrament one of two instituted by the Lord Jesus the other being that of the Lord Supper baptism marks the admission of the one baptized into God's church and his grafting into the body of Christ it is the mark of entry carried out only the once with the Lord Supper being the regular feast and celebration of ongoing membership one of the articles which is the basis of the

Anglican church says this that the sacraments are not only badges or tokens of the profession of Christians but are sure witnesses and effectual signs of God's grace and good will towards us through them he works invisibly within us both bringing to life and strengthening and confirming our faith in him well I think we've seen that this evening and with what we have observed so far we can say confidently that there is no human contribution the one doing the baptizing is not doing anything other than making a splash and getting wet and in Martin's case going through a third set of clothes in one day no it is all of God he is the one who does the washing the regeneration and renewal in

the Holy Spirit is perhaps most helpfully described in the words of the prophet Ezekiel in the Old Testament Ezekiel 36 where he describes the actions promised by God for undeserving people like you and me I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from your idols I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you I will remove from you your heart of stone you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws God the father pouring out his holy spirit through Jesus Christ is washing the one baptized by his power what the sacrament is is an outward visible very visible symbol and sign of the inward grace that only God can do God saves us through his mercy and he has given us this symbol and pledge of his salvation in baptism through admitting us into his church and engrafting us into the body of his son

[20 : 17] Jesus Christ the sign and the thing that it signifies are linked though sometimes the one being baptized fails to live up to their side but that doesn't negate the effectiveness of what God has promised and he still offers his grace day by day to each one of us as we continue to fail and confirmation which some of us saw at the 1130 this morning is the opportunity for us to pray that God would carry out what he has promised in the baptism of those who have been baptized and who are now making their own profession of faith as Hannah did this morning and by this engrafting into Christ's body we become heirs according to the hope of eternal life we have the down payment on the fulfillment of all things even when we don't see them now as was reflected in our prayer time this evening so we know why

God acted and how he acted to save us finally to what end are we saved verse eight the saying is trustworthy and I want you to insist on these things so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works these things are excellent and profitable for people why has Paul been telling Titus and the church members of this as a way reminder after all they already were Christians that he's talking to so why does he need to remind them well so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works these things are excellent and profitable for people why are good works important they're not the basis of the salvation but they are the necessary fruit and evidence of the gospel working in the lives of

God's people that is important in and of itself but there's more here Paul is always thinking beyond the current members of the church verses 1 and 2 of our passage he relates the good works to the governing authorities and towards all people and here he returns to that theme these things are excellent and profitable for everyone listen to these words of the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7 watch out for false prophets they come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves by their fruit you will recognize them do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles likewise every good tree bears good fruit but a bad tree bears bad fruit a good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire thus by their fruit by the works you will recognize them good works are the necessary evidence of the work of

God in our lives it is what Paul commended in the Thessalonian church founded during a short visit of the apostle Paul in the midst of much affliction he says this for we know brothers and sisters loved by God that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction you know how we lived among you for your sake you became imitators you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia notice that chain reaction of good works brought about by the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit which is what we have been praying for for Callum this evening as Paul and his team were imitators of Christ so now that same DNA of the child of

God is seen as Paul remarks in the Thessalonian Christians and they had become an example to all in Greece now the word example which is used there is the same word as we see in Titus chapter 2 verse 7 in everything set them an example by doing what is good in your teaching show integrity seriousness so there's an evangelistic purpose in Paul's instruction that they should lead lives of good works well our trustworthy saying shows us that good works will not earn a salvation but also that good works are necessary fruit of our salvation in our lives when Paul finishes with profitable for people he's referring to those showing that fruit in their lives but also the impact of that unnatural fruit in the lives of others they do have an evangelistic impact listen to this reflection on the impact of good works done by

[25 : 47] Christians in the days of the Roman Empire centuries ago it says this famine and war had recently afflicted the city of Caesarea so when the plague hit in the early fourth century the

populace were already weakened and unable to withstand this additional blow the populace began fleeing the city one of the larger ones of the Roman Empire for safety in the countryside however in the midst of the fleeing inhabitants at least one group was staying behind the Christians the bishop as bishop of the city and a historian of the early church Eusebius recorded that during the plague all day long some of them the Christians tended to the dying and to their burial countless numbers with no one to care for them others gathered together from all parts of the city a multitude of those withered from famine and distributed bread to them all Eusebius goes on to state that because of their compassion in the midst of the plague the

Christians deeds were on everyone's lips and they glorified the God of the Christians such actions convinced them that they alone were pious and truly reverent to God well that's an example centuries ago of what the gospel does in people's lives it naturally produces an unnatural fruit which is very visible whether we know it or not amongst those around us and has that impact so I hope tonight as we've looked at why God saves and how he saves and for what end he saves that that has built us up a little bit and reminded us of not just what Callum has been doing this evening but what all those of us who call ourselves Christians are being called to do so let's pray together a moment of silence as we allow God to imprint on our lives and our hearts what he would have us do Father we thank you for the glorious gospel of Christ that though we don't deserve anything yet your property your character is always to have mercy and we thank you that that mercy is displayed in the loving kindness of Jesus Christ we thank you for all that that achieves and for the work of your Holy Spirit in our lives to produce the fruit of the Spirit in the circumstances in which you placed us and that that in itself is a witness to those around us of the God that we serve so please make us faithful servants of you this week for we ask that in Jesus name Amen Amen Thank you.