

Church Matters: Studies in Paul's letter to Titus

(1) Why Study Paul's letter to Titus?

Titus 1:1-9

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Today we begin a brand new series of sermons from the little book of Titus. But why, out of 66 books in the Bible, have we chosen to preach from Titus? Well, we divide this morning's sermon into two parts: Three reasons we have chosen Titus and then three words of introductions to Titus.

Reasons for preaching Titus

(1) *Christians must hear the whole counsel of God.* The first reason is a very general one, Christians must hear "the whole counsel of God." When Paul said farewell to the church at Ephesus, he said: "*I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.*" (Acts 20 verse 27)

During his three years at Ephesus, Paul had shared *all* of God's Word with them. Not just the bits he liked, or the parts that were easy to hear, he had preached *everything* to them. That's the obligation of every church pastor, to preach the *whole counsel* of God, from the OT and the NT, from the books of law and the Gospels, from Psalms and letters, *everything*.

Joseph Caryl, a puritan pastor, 1600s, preached over 250 sermons on the book of Job! When I meet Joseph in heaven, I want to ask him, "Did your congregation get to hear Matthew or Genesis or Revelation?!" Last term we spent time in the OT looking at the life of Abraham from Genesis, this term, a NT letter. We need to hear the whole counsel of God.

(2) *Christians need a "church-reset" after the pandemic!* But second reason, to preach through Titus is that after the pandemic we all, to a greater or lesser extent, need a "Church reset". You know when your Wi-Fi is playing up, you have to press the reset button, which reboots the device back to where it should be. The years of pandemic isolation have taken their toll, and Christians have collectively lost why gathering together is so important and forgotten how to behave, how to relate to church community. Because we continued meeting in Home Groups during the pandemic, I think we were spared some of these detrimental effects. Let me give you two pieces of evidence, from the evangelical churches in the USA, a different setting, but there are similarities with the UK.

You may have heard of the 30-40-30 hypothesis? After the pandemic 30% of many American congregations simply disappeared and stopped going to church. 40% of the congregation have remained on the side-lines after the pandemic and only 30% of the original congregation have remained totally committed to the Lord and his people. That's a devastating statistic. While the Lord has protected us here at Manor Park Church, we've felt some of those winds of change. We need a post-pandemic church reset! We need to go back to the Scriptures and relearn what God says about the local church.

The other sign that things are not right after the pandemic is the number of pastors under distress, I quote from the church research people, Barna, *“there has been a dramatic increase in the number of pastors who are thinking about quitting ministry entirely.”* And the number 1 reason they give is “stress”. All the changes that have happened in church life over the last 2-3 years have put pastors under enormous pressure.

I was talking to an experienced fellow pastor a few months ago who had just come back from a two-week holiday and told me he did not feel rested at all. It was the first time in his pastoral ministry—he had come back from a summer’s break unrested. May I ask you a question: Do you pray for your pastor? I too have felt some of these pressures over the last few years. This increased pressure on pastors is another sign that something needs resetting in our churches.

(3) Churches must be reminded what God expects of leaders. The third reason we’re taking a look at Titus is because, if the Lord leads us to church plant again, the Lord will raise up more elders, and we all need to know what Jesus expects of church leaders; and Titus, along with 1 and 2 Timothy, tell us what the Lord expects of elders. (It’s also good for the six of us who are presently elders to remind ourselves what the Lord expects).

It seems as though not a month passes by without news of the fall of some mega-church pastor. Over the last week or so, yet another super-pastor from across the Atlantic has resigned because of inappropriate texting to a woman not his wife. What does Jesus Christ expect of church leaders, present and future? Titus will tell us.

Let me now briefly introduce the letter of Titus:

- Who is Titus?
- Why did Paul write this letter?
- What will we learn from this letter?

Who is Titus?

Titus was one of Paul’s converts. That’s what Paul means in chapter 1 verse 4, when he says: *“To Titus, my true son in our common faith.”* Somewhere on Paul’s missionary journeys Titus heard the Good News of Jesus and believed the message. And when that happened a unique “spiritual father-son” bond was formed between Paul and Titus.

We know Titus came from a pagan background not a Jewish one, because he was not circumcised (Galatians chapter 2) which means that he had no Bible background—he didn’t grow up in a Bible home, he had no Bible knowledge during his childhood—and yet, look he is entrusted with a great spiritual responsibility. No-one is at a ministry disadvantaged because of their non-Christian background!

Titus was probably fairly young, because in chapter 2 verse 15, Paul says “Do not let anyone despise you” and when Paul says that to Timothy he says “don’t let anyone look down on you *because you are young.*” (1 Timothy 4:12)

Titus had become Paul’s trusted assistant. After Paul and his team had evangelised the island of Crete, lots of people believed, and Paul left Titus on the island to complete the work he had begun: *“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders as I directed you.”* Why give such a big task to Titus?

Because Titus was a proven worker. Titus had proven himself worthy of the task in the past. Paul had given Titus the tricky task of sorting out the messed up church of Corinth, so he knew he could trust him for this challenging job. This is how responsibility works in the church—you give someone a smaller task and see how well they do it, and if they prove faithful and dependable in small things, you give them greater things.

But the most endearing characteristic of Titus is that he was a loyal friend. Time and again, Paul writes affectionate things about Titus. *“Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia!”* (2 Corinthians 2) Come on Paul, surely you can preach without Titus holding your hand! Apparently not! *“For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus”* (2 Cor. 7)

Titus had become so precious to Paul that he could scarcely minister without him! I have people in my life who I think the same way about. We have worked side by side for so many years, and the thought of working without them troubles me!

So Titus is—Paul’s loyal “partner and co-worker” (2 Corinthians 8:23)

Why did Paul write this letter?

The answer is in verse 5: *“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.”*

Paul had already given Titus these instructions he says, why did he feel it was necessary to tell him again— by letter?! Could it be that Titus was reluctant to undertake some of them, he was dragging his heels as we say? Paul heard about this and felt he had to write to spur him on? We can surely understand the reluctance when we think of the difficulty of the task Paul gave him, having to rebuke rebellious people sharply and appointing elders!

We all need a godly nudge from time to time, don’t we? Don’t leave it to the elders—if you see someone who needs a nudge, Hebrews 10:25 says, “Spur one another towards love and good deeds,”

God overruled Titus's reluctance and blessed the whole church with this wonderful letter! If Titus had got on with task Paul right away Paul would not have needed to remind him and we would not have this letter! That is no excuse for us to procrastinate, but it shows how the Lord overrules our weaknesses.

What will we learn?

So what will the Holy Spirit teach us this term?

Jesus will teach us that Church Matters! I don't know where you rank the church on your list of life priorities or community priorities. For some of you God's people is and has remained your Number 1 community, but for other believers—and I think the isolation of the pandemic has played a part—other communities and events have slipped above your church community. Perhaps family or kids or work or hobbies or sport. The Holy Spirit will teach us how important the local church is, that Church Matters.

Jesus will teach us Church Matters. And then—the other meaning of that phrase—"Church Matters" Jesus will teach us a lot about church life. How churches should be run, what qualities should be seen in elders, what to do with false teachers, what should be taught to different groups in the church—older men, older ladies, younger men and younger women, and lots of other practical church matters as well.

Conclusion

The church does not belong to us, it does not belong to the elders, it does not belong to the members, it belongs to Jesus Christ, who gave up his life for the church. And we study Titus together we'll be listening to Jesus and we will want to respond in obedience to him, because of his great love for us.