

Church Matters
Studies in Paul's letter to Titus
(2) "Three Gospel Words - Faith, Truth & Hope"
Titus 1:1-9
September 18th 2022
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Whitfield and Wesley

John Wesley and George Whitfield were both great evangelists in the 1700s. An evangelist is someone who goes from city to city, or village to village and preaches the Good News about Jesus Christ. But their practices were quite different.

If George Whitfield came to your city, he'd preach the Gospel in the open air, village halls, houses— wherever he was given the opportunity (and no doubt people would believe the message) but then he'd leave the city and leave those young believers behind.

John Wesley would preach the Gospel in the same way, but then he'd gather the young believers into small groups so they could encourage one another and he'd appoint leaders to teach them and look after them. He was so methodical about this gathering into groups they called him a "Methodist!" In fact Wesley complained about people like Whitfield who did not gather Christians into groups!

"I am more convinced than ever that preaching like an Apostle, without joining together those that are awakened and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer. How much preaching has there been for these twenty years all over Pembrokeshire! But no regular societies, no discipline, no order or connection; and the consequence is, that nine in ten of the once-awakened are now faster asleep than ever."

Whose practice was more in line with the NT? Whitfield or Wesley? There is no question about it—Wesley got it right, because Jesus gathered the Twelve into a groups to teach them and so that they could encourage one another, and Paul did exactly the same!

The situation on Crete

On Sunday mornings we're making our way through a little letter in the NT called Titus. Paul, like Wesley and Whitfield had preached the Gospel all over the island of Crete and then he was called away suddenly, so he left Titus behind on the island to gather the new converts into groups, to teach them and to appoint leaders to care for them. *"The reasons 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."* (Verse 5)

There's a lesson here isn't there?—Christians can't make it on their own. We need one another to encourage us and we need godly leaders to teach and guide us—and to protect us from error. If you watched the first episode of Frozen Planet 2, you will have seen a grizzly bear attacking a herd of musk oxen—who did the grizzly bear go for? Not the big mature adults? No, it went for the new-borns. Satan attacks Christians—especially young Christians—or believers who are all on their own. We need to huddle together!

The little letter of Titus, just 3 chapters long, is all about the importance of Christians being gathered together in churches with elders caring for them, teaching them, building them up, protecting them. Today we're looking at just the first 4 verses.

Reasons for the letter

The task of organising the converts into groups, churches, was left Paul to Titus. It was difficult because the people on the Island were rather wild and rebellious, so Titus, it seems, was a little slow off the mark, reluctant to get on with such an undertaking so demanding. That's one reason Paul wrote this letter: to spur Titus on, "Come on Titus, get on with the work."

But there was probably a second reason for writing this letter, Paul wanted to give Titus the authority to do his work, "Look" Titus could say, "Paul has told me to do this, this is the way he has prescribed." So if someone said to Titus, "Who are you to appoint this person but not that one as a leader?" Titus could say, "Paul has given me a list of the qualities needed in a leader, look you can read it yourself!" And he could show them the letter. Because Paul was a very apostle. After he was dramatically converted on the road to Damascus with a blinding light and a voice from heaven, he was chosen by

God to preach the Gospel to the Gentile world—to everyone who was not a Jew!

The role of the Twelve apostles like Matthew and Peter and Thaddeus was largely to preach the Gospel to the Jews, but Paul's commission was to preach the Gospel to the rest of the world! Today only 0.2% of the world's population is Jewish, and that proportion probably wasn't much different in those days. Paul's task was to preach the Gospel to 99.8% of the world!

A very special apostle indeed!

And Paul is very much aware of this weighty assignment (Just as King Charles has been saying that he realises how serious the task of being king is for him. How did Shakespeare put it, "Heavy is the head that wears the crown.") Paul, is aware of the weight on his shoulders. Part of it is the task of revealing knowledge hidden in the past from everyone (Verses 2-3).

Paul, of course, didn't have any authority on his own, it was given to him by heaven. In verse 1 he calls himself a slave of God—he does exactly what God wants him to do—and he also calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ- sent by Jesus.

So, Paul is a very important apostle in the Bible, but only because God is his Master, and Jesus is the one who sent him.

So Paul writes this little letter to spur Titus to gather the new converts into groups, and to boost the authority of Titus to get the job done.

BUT! Before Paul explains the practical things that must be done on the island; even before he says "Hi" in verse 4, Paul shares the Gospel with Titus and his readers! Paul mentions FAITH, TRUTH and HOPE, which are three parts of the Gospel Message in verses 1-3. Gospel First!

Do you know that phrase "a one-trick pony?" I have heard people use it to describe the one thing they are best at or the one thing they love to do. Well Paul was a "one-trick pony", he had one great passion in his life and that was the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. There's a lesson for us as individual Christians and as a church. The great priority of our lives should be the Gospel—believing it, loving it, supporting its spread, sharing it with others; and as a church let us always be a Gospel church,

believing the Gospel, preaching the Gospel and sharing the Gospel wherever we go!
Let's not get side-tracked with secondary issues.

You may have heard that the school has given us the permanent use of this hall, so we won't have to set up and down each week, and we can redecorate it and so on. This is wonderful news, but a warning: let's not get side-tracked into putting all our energies into a building, let's continue to share the Gospel with people who have never heard it before.

So this sermon is about the message of the Gospel. Paul says in verses 1-3:

- The Gospel is about FAITH
- The Gospel is about TRUTH
- The Gospel is about HOPE

Perhaps you wonder what the Queen, who was, we are convinced, a true Christian, believed, well this morning you will hear. Perhaps you wonder if you are a true believer, well do you have Faith, do you love the Truth, do you have hope? Ask yourself. And for the rest of us, it will be good to return to the basics of our faith again this morning.

The Gospel is about FAITH *(a gift God gives to the elect)*

The Gospel is about Faith, says Paul. Paul was appointed an apostle so that God's chosen people would have faith, "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect." A Christian is someone who has been given faith, the ability to believe.

Don't be troubled by the words "God's elect." God's elect are the people God has chosen. It is a wonderful fact that from before time began God chose us to belong to him. When the Gentiles heard Paul preaching, we read in Acts 13:48, "all who were appointed to eternal life believed." If you have faith it shows that you were chosen by God. A true Christian is someone who has faith.

Faith in **God**— they believe that an invisible God exists. That's a basic foundation stone of Christianity, you are convinced that God, the Creator of this amazing world and of us, exists.

*I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.*

And personal trust in Jesus Christ:

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

Do you have faith? If so, rejoice; you may have all kinds of fears and doubts, all sorts of difficult things may be going on or going wrong in your life, but if you have faith you belong to God. if not, ask God today to give you that gift. And he will!

The Gospel is about TRUTH
(knowledge that leads to godliness)

Secondly, the Gospel is about TRUTH, verse 1.

God's truth is located in the Bible: Truth about God, truth about the world we live in, truth about where we and the universe came from, truth about ourselves, truth about how God wants us to live, truth about how to get right with God, truth about the future, truth about Jesus.

Paul adds a word of explanation or caution, "the truth that leads to godliness." The kind of truth we need to hear and love is the kind that leads to practical holiness, a changed life, Paul says "truth that leads to godliness." You will find people and preachers who call themselves Christians consumed with so-called "truths" which don't lead to more holy living.

On the island of Crete some people were keen on Jewish Myths (verse 14). Today you will find people consumed with Israel, the End Times, Conspiracy Theories, numbers in the Bible, and so on. None of this knowledge leads to a change life, more often then not it leads to spiritual pride! “Knowledge puffs up” wrote Paul in 1 Corinthians 8. No the kind of spiritual knowledge we want to gather is the kind that transforms our hearts and lives.

The Gospel, begins with faith, but we need knowledge to grow into mature disciples of Jesus. And that useful apprenticeship knowledge is found in the Bible: *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16)*

This is why we want, with God’s help, to keep the Bible at the centre of church life.

You’re asking, What is the Gospel?

- The Gospel is about **FAITH**
- The Gospel is about **TRUTH**

The Gospel is about HOPE *(the hope of eternal life)*

And finally, the Gospel is about HOPE, verse 2. Paul says that faith and truth he’s just talked about, rest on something deeper, the hope of eternal life, the hope of one day living in a glorious new heaven and a new earth with God and his people. The core blessing of the Gospel, the underlying promise, is eternal life! Jesus came into the world to give us eternal life! This present world and this short life was never meant to be our destiny, it was always God’s plan for us to live in a renewed heavens and earth!

This is the core message of the Gospel! The foundational message of the Gospel is not about a changed life in this world, although God grants us new life, it’s not about being healthy or wealthy or educated in this life; the Gospel is about the promise of living with God in a renewed heavens and earth!

“Here is someone who has no fear of death, and who has hope in the future.” said Justin Welby after visiting the Queen in her last days.

The Bible doesn't tell us precisely what heaven will be like, because words are inadequate, but we are given glimpses:

We will have brand new bodies— not these weak, diseased, dying, limited bodies, but imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual ones (1 Corinthians 15). There will be no sadness whatsoever, because there will be no dying, no curse, no evil beings there (Rev 7 and 21). Instead of sorrow, heaven will be a place of ecstatic and eternal joy: picture language will have to do;

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 22)

Let's remember, every day, that this world is not our final home. How fleeting is this present life. Let's not get too settled, for we must leave everything behind. Instead let's set our affections on things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God.

What is the Gospel Message?

- It's about FAITH, believing in God, believing in Jesus Christ , the Son of God, our Saviour
- It's about TRUTH, growing in knowledge that changes our lives
- And, above all else, it's about the HOPE of eternal life with God, which he has promised to all who believe!

May God give to us all true faith, a love of truth and the Hope of eternal life. And to God be the glory. Amen.