

**Church Matters**  
**Studies in Paul's letter to Titus**  
**Tell me the Old Old Story! Titus 3:1-11**  
**Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers**

**The Gospel Changes Lives!**

In the 1970s and 1980s Toxteth in Liverpool was a rough place to live—it's been transformed today, but back then it was a challenging place to live: some of you may remember the riots of 1981. But right in the middle of Toxteth there was a church which shared the Good News with its local community; the Gospel bore fruit, and people were converted. Their whole lives were transformed; from despair to hope, from slavery to freedom, from emptiness to purpose. The only downside of these conversions—if there can ever be a downside to conversion! - was this: since now they worked harder and no longer wasted their time nor money on empty pursuits, they became wealthier! So some of moved out of the area to the “nicer” parts of Liverpool like Sefton Park and Aigburth! (Toxteth's loss was, I am sure, gain for these other areas of the city!)

**The spiritual downside on Crete**

On the Mediterranean island of Crete, 2000 years ago, when the same Good News was preached, many people had been converted to Jesus Christ, and everything about their lives changed too. One striking change was in their behaviour: Jesus made them more honest, more upright. That's one of the fruits of the Gospel. I remember attending a Christian convention called Word Alive! held every year at a Butlin Camp in North Wales. One particular year, the owners of the camp told the organisers that they were delighted with this annual convention because they discovered which electricity meters worked and which didn't! Christians were complaining “I can't pay for my electricity!”

Paul was concerned about a potential downside to the rapid moral transformation of these believer's lives—and it was this: spiritual pride! He was concerned that as God sanctified his Christian friends, they might begin to look down their noses at the pagan lifestyles of those around them! They might start judging them! Speaking against them!

Paul takes up this problem of spiritual pride in chapter 3 verses 2-8. He tells them directly not to look down on their pagan neighbours and relatives and friends:

*“Slander no-one, be peaceable and considerate and show true humility towards all men, or “perfect courtesy to all men.”*

But Paul is a spiritual doctor, and he discerns that underneath spiritual pride is a much deeper problem—these Christians are in danger of losing the Gospel! They are forgetting what they used to be like before God rescued them, “At one time, we too were foolish...” Forgetting that the core message of Christianity is that God loves lost, messed up, sinful people, so rather than slandering the world, they should be loving them and reaching out to them! A judgemental spirit towards a lost world could be symptom of a deep and profound spiritual illness: the danger of losing the Gospel! So Paul reminded them of the gospel.

### **Let's apply all of this to ourselves**

The main symptom of spiritual pride for **individual Christians** is a judgemental spirit towards unbelievers around us. We begin to think, if not pray like the Pharisee of Luke 18, “Lord I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income...” Or perhaps we tut at every downward step of our culture away from God. Spiritual pride, may I say this, can be a more serious problem for those of us who have been on the road for many years and have experienced the mighty power of God in our own lives.

The main symptom of spiritual pride for churches is that they become holy huddles, a sort of VIP club for insiders, forgetting, as someone put it, that “The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.” Or as another one put it, “The church is the only institution that exists for the benefit of non-members!”

Spiritual pride is a symptom that an individual Christian or a church is losing the Gospel! Because the Gospel is the most humbling message in the world! God did not choose us because we were good, he chose us in spite of our wickedness! And indeed not only our past sin, but our present sin: we continue all our days to miss the mark, every day we are in need of God’s grace, fresh forgiveness and repentance. In one of his very last letters, the godly Paul wrote, “This is a trustworthy saying worthy of full acceptance” said the godly humble holy loving Paul, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of who I am the worst.” (1 Timothy 1:15)

And so Paul, fearing his good Christian friends are in danger of losing the Gospel, preaches it to them all over again. And he says to us, whose lives have been transformed by the Gospel, don't get proud, remember where you have come from, remember the Gospel.

## #1 The Gospel reminds us what we were like!

Fasten your seat belts, "At one time **we too** were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. God did not look around the island of Crete, nor the cities of L'pool or Worcester, for good people to save! "Jane's a helpful member of her local community, she'll make a good Christian! - I'll save her!" "John is an honest guy, I'll choose him." "Jackie's come from a nice Christian home, I'll call her into my kingdom." None of us were called into God's kingdom because we were good people: "He saved us not because of righteous things we had done." (verse 5) Quite the opposite, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another."

*Foolish*—spiritually in the dark, we thought we were ever so wise, but as Paul says in Romans 1, our thinking was "futile" empty.

*Disobedient*—we had a rebellious attitude towards all rules whether God's or man's.

*Deceived*—easily led astray—without reliable guidance from God's word, without a shepherd to lead us—we were deceived by this counsel, led astray by that philosophy.

*Enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures*—whatever our sinful desires wanted us to do, we did—we had to do! The actor Matthew Perry, has come out with his life story (just in time for Christmas of course!) "*Friends, Lovers and the Big Terrible Thing*" The "Big Terrible Thing" is his addiction to alcohol and opiates. He discovered at the age of 14 that alcohol quelled negative thoughts and later that a painkiller prescription brought serenity and soon he was taking 55 pills a day. Perry reckons he's attended 6,000 AA meetings, detoxed 65 times, and spent around \$7m to get sober. But not just Matthew Perry, but everyone outside of Christ, including you and I, were once enslaved by different kinds of passions and pleasures.

*We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another” says Paul, read: we were relationally dysfunctional, we treated people around us with malice and jealousy, and they in turn hated us!*

The Gospel reminds us that we too were once lost sinners, like everyone else in the world! We have nothing to be proud about! So let no Christian ever look down on any unbeliever! And if you are not a Christian today, there is hope for you, whatever your background, whatever you have done! God loves sinners! “The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19). Jesus spent so much time with “bad people” they slanderously said of him. ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ (Matthew 11) The gospel reminds us what we once were like!

## **#2 The gospel declares what God has done for us!**

Paul uses four words to describe the heart of God towards rebels and sinners, because that is where the Good News began: Kindness and love (verse 4), mercy (v.5) and grace (v.7). One day the invisible compassion in the heart of God towards sinful people was embodied in Jesus Christ, “the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared” (verse 4) Paul is talking about the incarnation, which we celebrate on Christmas Day. God became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ! At that moment the kindness, love, mercy and grace, hidden in the invisible heart of God was revealed through Jesus Christ:

*Love came down at Christmas,  
love all lovely, Love divine;  
Love came down at Christmas;  
star and angels gave the sign.*

Paul then uses three words to describe how God’s kindness, love, mercy and grace acted:

**(1) God has *SAVED* us**, verse 5— the word implies we need to be saved from something, and that something is the consequences of our sin, “saved from God’s wrath” Romans 5:9. You see, all the sin we have committed and continue to commit deserves to be punished, for God is the Judge of the universe. But Jesus suffered the penalty for our sins that we should have borne, on the cross, so that we could be forgiven and be saved from the punishment of hell!

**(2) God REGENERATED us,** verse 5-6, “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.” Paul’s talking about the new birth, he’s talking about regeneration, about being born again by the Holy Spirit. As someone listens to the Gospel, a supernatural miracle takes place which thoroughly changes that person from the inside out. “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God.” (1 Peter 1:23) Salvation, you see, is a divine miracle! We can’t become Christians by ourselves, God must perform a miracle and give us a new heart with new desires and new loves and new hates.

Just this week the statisticians told us that only 46% of the population of the UK call themselves Christian, down from 60% just ten years ago. But that 46% is surely much too high. It’s likely that many of the people who said “I am a Christian” did so because (a) they were brought up in a religious home or (b) they occasionally go to church or (c) their parents Christened them when they were babies, or (d) they identify with our national heritage as a Christian country—but none of those things make us a true Christian!

A true Christian is a man or woman who has been born again by the Holy Spirit. It’s a total transformation of the inner man, which then leads to an outward transformation of life!

**(3) God JUSTIFIED us.** The third salvation word Paul uses is “justification”. Verse 7. Justify is a legal term used in court and means to declare righteous! In spite of the guilty verdict they are declared righteous! How can that be?! All our sin is laid on Christ who has paid for it in full. And all the righteousness of Christ is made to their account so that they are viewed as perfect

### **#3 The Gospel Proclaims our future Hope!**

“Having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” The Gospel is a rags to riches story! The Gospel found us in spiritual poverty and then lavished on us the riches of God—that’s what heirs means—Romans 8:17, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.” All the riches of Jesus Christ becomes ours, and add to that the hope of eternal life in a new world beyond the grave!

Have you wondered why we haven't preached any sermons on global warming or COP 27? It's not because we don't care about our planet, we are called to look after it. It's because we know this planet is not our final home! One day *"The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be destroyed.. But we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."* (2 Peter 3) Our hope is not in this old planet earth, but in a completely renovated new one! And we're looking forward to that glorious new world! We have hope!

As a pastor, I have the great privilege of speaking to Christians in the last days of their lives. I don't have to pretend! I don't say "I hope you get better" when they and I and the medical staff all know that death is just around the corner." No, we can face death filled with hope! I ask them "Are you ready to die?" And then we talk about the mansions Jesus has prepared for them!

Christians are filled with HOPE!

The French Philosopher Luc Ferry recently says *"Hope is a blight"*, because, he argues, if you're always thinking about the future, you get distracted from enjoying the present! Nothing could be further from the truth! Future hope fills our present lives with purpose and meaning:

It helps us endure bodily suffering in this world because we know one day we will be given a brand new body! Hope helps us put up with injustice because we know that one day God will set the record straight. It motivates us to make many sacrifices in this world, serving others joyfully knowing that we are storing up treasures in heaven!

So Lord keep us from all spiritual pride. Lord help us to make the Gospel, sharing the Gospel the great priority of our lives and our church—that's how to think of the cards! And thank you Lord for saving my soul, thank you Lord for making me whole, thank you Lord for giving to me, your great salvation so rich and free