

2nd February 2025

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning to you. It's lovely to be with you this morning. Thank you for, well, I think I probably should thank Johan, shouldn't I, for arranging the swap. If I put that down! there will that be alright? And yeah, it's good to be with you and I bring, as it were, greetings from Farnham Baptist Church. It's wonderful to have a sense on the other side of Farnham.

There are believers in the Lord Jesus worshipping, in many ways very similar to what we've just done here this morning and therefore serving the Lord together. Can I lead you in prayer and lead us together in prayer and ask for God's help as we come to his word. Our gracious God and Heavenly Father, we thank you for the scriptures of the Old and New Testament. We thank you, Father God, that you're the God who's spoken in those scriptures. As the Holy Spirit led, so hands wrote down your words so that what we have just heard read is your words.

And we want to ask again this morning that by your Holy Spirit you'd come and help us as we listen. Help us to hear you speaking to us, shaping us, stirring our love for you and our faith in you.

We ask in Jesus' precious name. Amen. I do encourage you just to have your Bible open at Titus chapter 3. As I say, it's page 1199 in your church Bibles. Towards the end of last year, I found myself once or twice a week walking through a set of doors, through a kind of double lobby, turning right, going through another set of doors and then finding myself thinking of Titus chapter 3 verses 4 and 5. If I can have my slides up on there, I put it up just for you to look at.

These words, but when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us not because of things that we had done, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. You have to forgive me. I read the ESV in my private devotions. Therefore, I'm juggling the NIV and the ESV in my brain. But these are the words that I had in my mind as I walked through these doors. And a sense of the kindness of God was pressed week after week on my heart as I went through these doors.

[2 : 36] I thought I would take the opportunity to invite you just to reflect with me today on verses 3 to 8 of Titus chapter 3 in particular. And I really want to do three things with you. I want to reflect with you on how they give us clarity about the gospel. I want to help you hear that they give us a call to kindness. And actually, I want to suggest to you that they give us confidence in evangelism too.

So that's where I'm going this morning. So first of all, clarity about the gospel. Ian's already pointed out to us that these verses talk about the problem that people have. In verse 3, we're reminded what all people are like without God's work in them, before God's work in them. And Ian's already pointed out to us, make sure you notice the we too. 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. Notice it's we too. It's not them out there, outside the church. It's we too.

It's us too. You know, Titus, I think there are three pastoral epistles in the New Testament. One Timothy, two Timothy, and Titus. And all three of them, Paul is writing to an individual pastor. The clues in the name. Okay, so in one Timothy and two Timothy, who is Paul writing to? Timothy. And in Titus, who's he writing to? The clues in the name. But they're all open letters. Do you know what I mean by that? That they're to an individual, but the church that the individual is serving is supposed to hear them too. And so Paul here is writing to Titus, and the church in Crete is supposed to hear it to, so the we too is all of us, is the point that he's making. As Paul wrote, no doubt he was thinking about his own life. You probably know quite a bit about his conversion. He'd been an opponent of the gospel. He'd been foolish because he'd resisted God. He'd been disobedient and deceived. He had no doubt that he was serving God by opposing people who trust in Jesus Christ. But he was wrong.

He'd been gripped by passions. In Acts chapter 9, you read about how he went about with breathing out murderous threats, is what it says. He was driven by this passion to oppose Christianity and his campaign against Christians. He'd been full of hatred. But again, it's not I, it's we too. This is true of

all of us, Paul is saying. We all sin. I quite like that little acronym. If you've done that one at Bethel, sin, S-I-N stands for shove off God, I'm in charge, not you. That's quite good, isn't it? You know, it's not just that we do wrong things, it's that we want to do wrong things. We want to tell God, you can't be God in my life. Shove off God. I'm in charge, not you. We all sin. And what Paul is saying is, look, in order to get what I'm wanting you to grasp, in order to get hold of this truth that I want to press upon you, you need, in order to understand how extraordinary God's kindness is, you need to contemplate who you were before God and his grace affected your life. We've got to understand as Christian people that a moral life without God is a foolish life. You know, the Bible says that the fool says in the heart, there is no God. We need to understand that a life without worship of the living God is a disobedient life because we were made to worship God. We need to understand that your nice neighbor who thinks that there is no God is a deceived person. We need to understand that nice people around us with no constraints on their lives, that they will follow their heart's desires and they will be enslaved. And longings and cravings cause conflicts. See, the problem that people have is not at all hopeful. And when you grasp that, it makes the kindness that God showed all the more remarkable. So in verse 3, you've got the problem that people have. In verses 4 through to 7, you've got the kindness that God showed. But, begins verse 4, God's kindness is surprising. It's not a reward for good behavior. When you read verse 3, you might expect God's judgment to come. But, begins verse 4, when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, his kindness appeared. What does that mean?

So the word appeared here has that sense of revealed, unveiled. You know, if you had a, you wouldn't have a plaque here at Bethel, would you, in memory of somebody. But, if you did, you might have a, you might have a day where you have like a curtain over it. And then, there comes this moment when it's, when it's revealed, when, when the plaque appeared, when it's uncovered. God's kindness appeared. It was unveiled to the world so it could be seen. How? In Jesus. It's in Jesus, isn't it? It's in the person of Jesus. It's in all that Jesus has done in order to save and redeem. It's, it's in his incarnation, in his coming, which we've just remembered at Christmas. The, the word became flesh and made his dwelling amongst us. The God who created the cosmos became small became small in order to save us. It's in his life. It's, it's in his death for sinners on a cross. It's in his resurrection and his living now as risen Lord. It's in his promise to receive all who come to him in faith and repentance. God's kindness has appeared.

[9 : 09] And notice this, verse five is so important and I fear there are so many people both in the wider church and in the world who simply don't get this. Interesting question. What do your non-Christian neighbors, colleagues and friends think you believe? I'm, I'm, I'm in a, I fly in one of the airplanes. It's one of, one of my hobbies and I'm in a club with people. You know, I, stop swearing the vicars here.

You know, you can imagine that, can't you? You know, they think that what I believe and practice is morality. Jesus wants you to be good. Jesus wants you to be good is not the gospel.

But I think, I fear that so many people around us in the world think that that's basically what we believe. We believe in God and we believe that God wants us to be good. So we better be good. But that's not the Christian truth at all. Look at verse five. Verse five is so helpful. He saved us. Not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. The gospel is not Jesus wants you to be good because you are not good. You can't be good. But God is merciful. And he's done everything that's necessary in Jesus in order to forgive you and change you and make you ultimately good. God's kindness, you see, is true kindness. It's authentic kindness because it's undeserved kindness. He doesn't show kindness because we qualify. He shows us kindness even though we don't qualify.

[10 : 55] God's kindness appeared in Jesus so that we might have a spiritual encounter with God so that rebirth, the text says, might happen in us. He comes to change us, to refurbish us. The biblical word is renewal, a reorientation of the heart, that God works in believers by the Holy Spirit. And this is all God's kindness. Jesus' work for us and the Spirit's work in us. It's the kindness of God. And the text doesn't tell us this, but the Bible tells us so clearly that he does this as we respond to and receive Jesus in repentance and faith. This is the extraordinary kindness of God. And his kindness continues in salvation in verse 7. He says, you're justified by grace, our right standing with God. That the fact that we can come and worship God, that we can come and approach God and speak to him as Father, our right. All that is a product of the kindness of God. It's through what he's done that we are welcomed back, not as hired servants, but as heirs to an

inheritance. It's a text that helps us be clear about the gospel. The kindness of God appeared, not because we deserved it. We didn't deserve it.

But the kindness and love of God, our Savior, appears. And you see, in Paul's theology, this is really important because clarity about the gospel, the kindness of God appearing, God's undeserved kindness appearing to us means that it is natural for us to show kindness to others. You see, in Paul's theology, this is how believers are helped to do good. Look at verse 8. 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.

It's a trustworthy saying. You know, there are five trustworthy sayings in the New Testament, and they're all in the pastoral epistles. So there's three in 1 Timothy, there's one in 2 Timothy, and there's one in Titus. And it seems to me that what Paul's doing here is he's writing to a younger pastor, and he's kind of saying, in your ministry, make sure you get this. Make sure you hold on to this. You can rely on this thing being true. So here Paul is saying, Titus, make sure you get this. You can rely on this. I want you to stress this. I want you to talk about the kindness of God, the way that it's undeserved. I want you to stress it. Make sure they get it, Titus. Make sure they understand that the salvation that they, the Christians in Crete, knowing Jesus, is undeserved, that it's unmerited, that it's founded on the kindness of God. It cannot be attained. It's offered in mercy. It's an expression of God's generosity. It must be received as a gift. And when received as a gift, it brings them into a standing with God that's gracious.

And here's why they need to get it, Titus. Because when Christians understand that they've been treated with kindness, then they are equipped and moved to be kind, so that they will devote themselves to doing good. Do you see it? You see, if you get this, that God has been kind to you, it's undeserved kindness. If you get this, then you will be careful to devote yourself doing what is good. If you find yourself on the receiving end of a breathtaking shower of God's kindness that you didn't deserve. If you find yourself astonished by God's generosity to you, then it's a lot easier to show kindness and generosity to others without even asking the question, do they deserve it? Because I didn't deserve it. So make sure you get this. I am not saying, go out this week and do your best to be good. Go out this week and do your best to do good. I'm not telling you to do that. I'm saying, look, if your heart and mind are wrapped around how extraordinarily kind God has been to you, because as a preacher, what I've tried to do is stress the kindness of God to you.

If your heart and mind are wrapped around how his kindness to you is undeserved, how his kindness was generous, how his kindness was kind, as you grasp that, it will help you to do good to those that you encounter this week. God has shown undeserved kindness to us, and so it's natural to show kindness to others. That's the logic in this passage. Do you see that? And that brings me to confidence in evangelism.

[16 : 19] What was the lobby that I walked through, turned right, and then found myself thinking, 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. And why? Well, in August, I became a granddad.

Which was wonderful, but we weren't really expecting to become grandparents, Kathy and I, until the end of October. So our granddaughter, Hope, arrived much, much earlier than expected, and she ended up spending nine weeks in a special care baby unit before mum and dad could take her home. She's doing great now, so we're just rejoicing in that. So it was the lobby of John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford that I walked through, turned right into the Women's Centre, where there is neonatal ICU and a special care baby unit, and I thought to myself, as the week spent by, as I walked through the door, but when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us not because of righteous things he had done, but because of his mercy. It was for me.

You can probably say I'm a little bit emotional about it still. It sort of was an intersection, I suppose, of things that I'd been thinking about, reading about, listening to, and the emotional dynamics that were going on with that kind of particular experience in life at that time as well.

But you see, the point is this. I was struck by just the fact that such things exist, special care baby units, is startling evidence that the good news about the kindness of God revealed in Jesus is true and it works.

It is literally concrete evidence that the kindness of God revealed in Jesus is true and it works.

[18 : 24] How do I make that connection? Well, like this, okay. The events of the Gospel, the appearing of the kindness of God, happened in the Roman world. Some of you probably come across a book called Dominion by Tom Holland.

Did anyone know that book? Some of you may have read it. Very interesting book. Tom Holland is a historian. He set out to write that book and when he set out to write that book, he wasn't a Christian, basically.

It's a book about how did we get from a horrible ancient world to a modern world where we believe certain things and believe they're important. How did that happen?

I recently heard Tom Holland talking about the Roman world, which is kind of his speciality. He described it as unspeakably cruel to our way of thinking.

So one of the cruelties that was common in the Roman world was the cruelty of exposing unwanted or poorly infants. So you leave them to die. If you don't want them or they're sickly, you leave them to die.

[19 : 30] You leave them to die by dehydration, starvation, predation or to be taken by slave traders. And this is especially true in the ancient world of girls. I'm told it was almost universal that a second girl would be exposed.

I mean, it's just gross, isn't it, when you think about it? It probably turns some of your stomachs, that idea. But in the Roman world, people were not equal in dignity.

Those who were weak didn't matter. So it made all the sense in the world to get rid of the weak. So how do you get from a world like that to a world where babies are routinely left out to die?

How do you get from a world like that to a world where we have special care baby units? Where I'm doing the maths in my mind as I walk into this unit?

You know, one-to-one care for weeks for this little granddaughter of mine. I'm thinking, I just dread to think what this is costing. And there might be political arguments about who should pay for it, but nobody in our society thinks we shouldn't pay for it.

[20 : 41] How do we get from that in the Roman world to this in our world? Again, you know, you could say, well, medical science. But medical science says something about the how you do that.

It doesn't really say why you do that and think it's the right thing to do. Tom Holland described Paul's letters as a debt charge set off below the surface of the Roman world.

You know, over the last 2,000 years, sometimes we have to confess it, the church has been awful. It's been appalling sometimes. But sometimes it's been truly wonderful. The gospel meant that early Christians who remember, Paul is saying, God has been kind to you, so you should devote yourself to doing good.

Early Christians rescued. They became known for rescuing infants who had been exposed and raising them as their own children. Later, they founded orphanages and hospitals.

But they did something else. Christianity so shaped so many of the ideas that we think in our culture are self-evident. Ideas like kindness matters.

[21 : 47] The weak and the vulnerable should be protected and cared for. So that probably everyone you know thinks that a poorly baby should be cared for and given a chance of life.

Why do we think that? Well, it's a little bit more complicated, but in a word, Christianity. That's why we think that in our culture right now.

And I want to encourage you in your witness. I wonder if, as Christians, sometimes we've been on the back foot too much in recent years.

We've been on the defensive against the onslaughts of secularism. I think what's happening right now in Western culture is, for the time being, we're very inconsistent about it.

And some of you will work out what I'm saying there. We're very inconsistent about it, but for the time being, we still believe that it's natural to show kindness to others, to care for the weak.

[22 : 48] But we are forgetting what goes before that. We've forgotten the why. The why is because God has shown kindness to us.

And I actually think that people in our culture, intellectuals and just ordinary people around us, are waking up to this. That the way that we think as a culture about the importance of kindness doesn't make sense without the bit before, that God has shown his kindness to us.

And I think maybe that idea could help you in your evangelism. I'd like to encourage you to have Titus chapter 3 and verse 4 and 5 kind of logged away in your brain.

I mean, by all means, learn it as a memory verse, but just know where it is. Know how to find it quickly and easily in your Bible. Maybe you're here this morning and truth be told, you find it much easier to be kind to people than to talk to people about Jesus.

I would imagine that here this morning there are quite a few people who go, yeah, I find it easier to be kind to a neighbour than to talk to my neighbour about Jesus.

[24 : 09] Well, be kind because you are supposed to devote yourself to doing good. Be kind, but be ready to say, it's because I know that God has been kind to me.

Could I just show you a little verse that helps me make sense of this? Have a quick look with me at Titus chapter 3, verses 4 and 5. Could you see that that might be a useful thing to be ready to do? Maybe pray that God will give you the opportunity to share that verse with somebody. Or maybe it helps you. I have a neighbour who, he's elderly, he's a physicist, he's a very, very clever man, lovely man.

And he said to me a while ago, he said to me, I wish I had a faith like you do. And I have to confess, I know I'm a pastor and I'm supposed to be quick on the jaw with responses to questions like that. But I always think of better answers afterwards. Anyone else like that? He said, I wish I had a faith like you. And I think now, having thought through this whole business about Titus chapter 3, I think I would say to him now, I think you probably do.

[25 : 18] You believe that kindness matters. And one of the reasons why you believe that, can I just show you Titus chapter 3, verses 4 and 5. You can't prove with your physics that kindness matters.

You just can't. You believe something you can't prove. And I think the reason why you believe it is because of the impact of Jesus Christ on the world.

And maybe, maybe, it's always good to talk about Jesus. Maybe God might give you an opportunity and you have the opportunity to say something to someone, something like this.

You like kindness and love. You think kindness and love matters. Can I show you Titus chapter 3, verses 4 and 5? 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.

You see, the kindness of God appearing is not just about what Jesus did, is it? In Jesus, authentic kindness and love is personified, is it not?

[26 : 31] Jesus is the expression of kindness and love. So, if you like kindness and love, can I just introduce you to someone who is kindness and love personified?

Well, maybe you're here this morning and you're still trying to work out this Christianity business. You've never really received God's kindness and love in Jesus.

Maybe you've been thinking, you're a bit surprised because it's been right through the service today. This idea that God doesn't accept us because of what we do, our works, our righteous deeds.

He accepts us because of his mercy and grace. Maybe that's a new thing to you and it's taken you aback a bit. Can I ask you this morning, why would you not receive Jesus?

Why would you not respond to Jesus in repentance and faith if you've not done that? All of his intentions towards you are kindness and love.

[27 : 38] He offers you salvation out of the kindness and love of God. I wrote a little Christmas tract. I was so struck by this verse in the run-up to Christmas.

I wrote a little Christmas tract that I called Kindness Appeared about this. Particularly if you're here today and you're still trying to make sense of what it means to be a Christian. I'll leave them.

It's all right, Johan said it's okay. I'll leave a couple out there. Just take one, go away and read it and maybe, in God's grace, it will help you on your journey to coming to know the kindness of love of Jesus that he saved you and brought you into a relationship with himself.

Can I pray? And then I'm going to hand back to Ian. Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we thank you most of all for your kindness and love.

And Lord, we pray for one another because it can be so easy to go about our weeks and get distracted and hassled and anxious and worried about things that are going on and let that sense of your wonderful kindness to us kind of get lost in the midst of daily life.

[28 : 49] Lord, would you impress upon our hearts as we go out into the world this week your kindness and love. That sense that it's undeserved and therefore wonderful.

And as we have that sense, so help us to seek opportunities to do good. And Lord, we talked about our witness to help us, to give us opportunities just to point people to this text and to talk to them about the way that your kindness and love has changed the world and is personified in Jesus. We ask these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing together. Sorry, I did say, we agreed that, didn't we? So we're going to sing His Mercy is More, which is a very appropriate reflection, I think, on the text we'd be looking at. Thank you.