

Mission Month - The missionary message of Christmas

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[0 : 00] All right, very good. If you have your Bibles, let's turn back to Titus chapter 2. And I'm going to be spending some time this evening in verses 11 to 14.

Titus chapter 2. Of course, for those of you who don't know me, my name is John Carter. I am a minister of the gospel in a sister denomination to the Free Church of Scotland. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to minister the word tonight.

Before we open up the word, let's ask the Lord's blessing on the preaching of his word, shall we? Holy Spirit, once again, we humble ourselves before you and before your word, asking you to do your divine work in our hearts, that we would not merely read words on a page, but that this would be words of light and life, even the everlasting words of the gospel.

Help us to live these words out to the greater glory of Christ our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen. Amen. So, when Pastor James asked if I would preach tonight, he wanted me to tie in the message into the general theme of missions for Missions Month.

And I wanted to do that, but at the same time, I was giving some thought to what is on people's minds. How can we speak from the word to what people are actually dealing with? And as you can see here in Edinburgh, if you look around, it seems like Christmas is on everybody's mind already.

[1 : 17] My goodness, I think no one does Christmas quite like Edinburgh. I've never been here before, but I've never seen Christmas like this. I come from the States, as you can tell from the strange foreign accent, but I've seen Christmas markets in the U.S.

Nothing like this. Christmas decorations, but nothing like this. Holy smoke. What is it about Christmas in Scotland? Maybe it's after being banned for 400 years, you guys are having the equal but opposite reaction.

But no one does Christmas quite like Edinburgh, at least from my experience, in the U.S. Now, in the U.S., I'm sure you are aware of some of the culture wars that's going on in our country.

There is what some would call a war on Christmas in America. And by that, I mean the very word Christmas is supposedly offensive to many people who don't share our faith.

And so what you have in America, which I find so strange, so odd, but everyone wants to cut out the word Christmas and replace it with the very inoffensive word holiday.

[2 : 27] So you might be invited to a holiday party. People wish you the best holiday season. Instead of saying Merry Christmas, do they do this in the U.K.?

They don't say Merry Christmas. They say Happy Holidays. Happy Holidays is much more inoffensive. You might have your children at home baking holiday cookies, and you put up a holiday tree in your home.

Of course, you can't call it a Christmas tree because that might be offensive. But, of course, all of this begs the question, what holiday are we talking about? It's the unnamed holiday that no one wants to actually say of obviously it's Christmas.

Christmas. But in America, we observe Christmas, even today, not only as a religious festival, but as a nation. We recognize Christmas as a national event.

It's a nationally recognized federal holiday approved by the United States Congress. It was signed into law by President Grant. And that's why I was rather shocked recently when I heard that a school district in Georgia was sued to get the words Christmas holiday taken off of the school's calendar.

[3 : 35] The plaintiffs demanded that the words winter holiday be substituted. And they won in court. And that just amazes me because the last time I checked, President Grant did not sign legislation making winter holiday a federal day off.

No, he signed into law of a Christmas holiday. Now, unfortunately, that case in Georgia is representative of a wider movement across America to purge any remnant of the Christian religion from public life in the States.

From lawsuits over the Ten Commandments to the Pledge of Allegiance, because, of course, the American Pledge of Allegiance says that we are one nation under God, which is offensive to so many. And it seems to be escalating.

Now, the city of Las Cruces in New Mexico is facing a lawsuit to change the name of the city. Because, as you know, Las Cruces in Spanish means the cross. And I guess if they win, we better watch out, because now what are you going to do about all the rest of the cities?

San Francisco, San Antonio, all the rest. How about Corpus Christi in Texas? I mean, I wonder, where is all this hostility towards the Christian faith coming from?

[4 : 43] Why the hostility towards Christmas in particular? Because Christmas, ultimately, when you boil it down to its essence, it's the most wonderful message in the world.

And this is where I wanted to sort of tie it into our missionary message, because the missionary message is that a Savior has appeared, offering salvation to all. And we'll talk about that in verse 11 when we get into the text here.

But you get the idea here that ultimately the Christian message, the message of Christmas, the message of the incarnation, is a wonderful message.

I mean, who can argue it? Peace on earth, goodwill to men. I mean, in a nutshell, what's Christmas about? It's about love and joy and peace and hope. How are these things so offensive?

Ultimately, it's a message about grace. It's about blessing and favor from God because of the sacrifice of our Savior. I pray that you don't lose sight of that here in Edinburgh in the middle of all the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season.

[5 : 48] And that brings us to our proposition statement tonight. All right, so Dr. Carter, what's the sermon about in a single sentence? Well, here it is. The message, the missionary message of Christmas is grace.

And that's what we have here in our text. And I hope you'll see that as we begin to unpack this text. Now, we've already read the overall passage, but I want to zero in on verse 11. If you'll look at verse 11, we'll pick up there.

The apostle writes, for the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. Now, I realize I may be reading from a different translation than what you have there in your laps, but you get the idea.

What are we getting at? Point number one, Christmas grace. The grace of our missionary message is the grace of salvation, verse 11. Now, when we say grace, what are we talking about?

So often when you hear the word grace, you say, oh, well, that's unmerited favor, right? What's the grace of God? It's unmerited favor. That's as good as far as it goes. But I would say it's even more than that.

[6 : 47] It's not just unmerited favor, but rather it's favor in spite of demerit. That's Christian grace. Grace is the greatest gift of God bestowed upon those who are deserving of the greatest punishment.

It's God's power working in your life even though you don't deserve it. God's favor, God's blessing in your life even though you don't deserve it. Now, our text tells us here in verse 11 that this grace of salvation has finally appeared.

There's that word that's related to Advent. Now, you realize that most Reformed churches don't follow the so-called liturgical calendar very closely, but if you do follow the liturgical calendar, you realize that we're not in the Christmas season right now.

We're in the season of Advent, right? Advent is all about anticipation. It's about waiting. It's about expectation. Now, here in verse 11, it's talking about how this grace has appeared. It's here. The word comes from the same root as the word epiphany, meaning appearance or manifestation.

You see, the light of the world has come to those who dwell in darkness. Jesus is the light of the world, right? John chapter 8, verse 12. I am the light of the world.

[7 : 58] He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. And our verse here tells us that this appearance is salvation bringing.

Now, who is this salvation offered to? Of course, we know it's offered to those who dwell in darkness, right? It's offered to all men. Look at verse 11. Who does it go out to?

It goes out to all. And that's the glory of our missionary message, that it doesn't exclude anybody, the glory of Christmas, that this message of God's grace and favor goes out to all. Not to some.

Not just to the whites or to the blacks or to the Asians, but it goes out to everyone. Now, the text tells us here in verse 11, for this grace has appeared. And that word for ties this verse into what has gone before here in the chapter.

It ties it into the previous list. Who did he come for? Well, it comes for the older men in verse 2. The older women in verse 3. The younger women. Husbands and children in verse 4.

[8 : 58] The younger men in verse 6. The servants in verse 9. You see, that's who Christ came for. The young, the old, the men and women, the rich and the poor, all people alike.

All are guilty before God. And from them all, he gathers his people. He doesn't bypass the aged because they're aged.

He doesn't bypass the women because they're women. No, it doesn't work like that. All types of people from every nation and race and tongue and nationality and tribe. God's offer of salvation extends to everyone without discrimination.

It's what the theologians call the free offer of the gospel. Or the universal offer. John 3, 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever will believe in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

You see, the grace of our missionary message, the wonder of our missionary message is this message of grace going out and offered to all. You know, the story's told of a Scotchman in the late 19th century who arrived in Liverpool, England where he was to set sail on a ship bound for America.

[10 : 14] And he reached in his pocket and he looked carefully at the pitifully small amount of money that he had and he decided that he would economize on food during the trip in order to have more money on hand when he got to New York.

And so he went to a small store and he bought a supply of crackers and cheese to see him through the many days at sea. But as the voyage progressed he began to get tired of eating the same thing over and over again.

And to make matters worse the dampness in the air made his crackers soft and his cheese hard and just when he couldn't stand to eat another cracker he caught the smell of fine turkey dinner that a steward was taking to another passenger.

And so the hungry man made up his mind that he would have at least one good square meal even though it might cost him a little bit more than what he thought was responsible for him to spend.

And so he waited for the steward to come back and he asked him how much it would cost to go to the dining room and get a dinner. And the steward was rather surprised by the question and asked the man if he had a ticket.

[11 : 19] And of course the poor man showed him his ticket and that's when the steward told him that all the meals were included in the price of the cruise. He could have gone to the dining room at any time and eaten as much as he'd liked.

You know sometimes I wonder how often we're like this cheese and crackers man thinking that all the goodness and grace of God must surely go to other people. Certainly it wouldn't be extended to me but when we think like this it shows how we don't understand that Jesus Christ came to offer salvation to all indiscriminately.

I mean how many people today live with this soggy crackers and rancid cheese sort of mentality instead of glorifying God and enjoying him forever. Thinking that Jesus Christ came for those with a first class ticket.

You know those who've got it all together the rich and the powerful or the young and the beautiful but Paul reminds us in Romans that he that spared not his own son but delivered him up for us all how shall you not with him freely give us all things?

Romans 8.32 You see everything that is necessary for a full and complete life with meaning and purpose and fulfillment is found in Jesus Christ who paid for all the passages on the boat of life for us with all the meals included.

[12 : 47] So I encourage you to take a moment tonight and consider your own heart. Do you realize that our missionary message that Christmas grace is not merely for the children tonight?

It's not just for the privileged tonight but it's for all. Men and women young and old the rich the poor you see Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem to offer redemption to all for all had fallen into sin.

My goodness if you didn't have any sin you'd have no need for a savior you'd have no need for Christmas grace but the scripture tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

There's not a righteous man who lives on earth who continually does what is right and never sins and that's the good news of Christmas that this redeemer has come that this grace according to verse 11 has appeared and it brings salvation to all.

So what will you do with the Christ of Christmas? Well you can receive him or you can reject him right receive him as scripture tells us to as many as received him he gave power to become the children of God first John 1 9 or you may reject him John 1 11 he came unto his own and his own received him not it's up to you God calls all men everywhere to repent and receive the Savior point number one the grace of Christmas is the grace of salvation offered to all point number two let's move on take a look at verse 12 and here you see how the grace of Christmas is the grace for Christian living pick up in verse 12 the apostle says and we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures and we should live in this evil world with wisdom righteousness and devotion to god now different translations will translate the word a little differently here the one that I have here says it instructs us your translation may say it trains us but the idea here is that this grace that is revealed trains us to follow Christ you see this is not something that comes automatically now what does come automatically well ungodliness and worldly passions that comes automatically there is no need in training for that you know

[15 : 04] I have my teenage son here with us tonight and I remember when he was little I never funny thing I never had to train him how to lie somehow that always that just came natural I never had to tell him now listen son when you want to deceive somebody here is how you do it somehow he figured that out no I had to train him how to tell the truth I never had to train him how to be selfish that come natural I think he got it from his mother's side of the family I think but I had to train him to learn to share you know to tell the truth you see self-control doesn't come natural being out of control that's what comes natural living an upright godly life that doesn't come natural the opposite of that is what comes natural that's why we need to be born again that's why we need to have new hearts where these things do become natural you see this grace trains us in godliness as Paul says elsewhere how the law serves as a pedagogue it's our tutor or our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ you see this grace guides us and it trains us by the means of grace perhaps you've heard that phrase before the means of grace we're talking about the word and sacraments and prayer these are how

God works in our lives and these things these means of grace teach us they chasten us they counsel us they comfort us they encourage us in our walk with Christ they admonish us when we need to be admonished and convicted when we need to be convicted but as we apply the means of grace we are trained to deny vice and to affirm virtue now notice Paul's pattern here in verse 12 he gives you the negative and then the positive so first negatively we are to renounce or reject all ungodliness as he puts it here instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures right the negative side we are to repudiate all sin I mean taking actual action no one sleeps their way to heaven we need to strive against sin and this is what the holy spirit works in our hearts we're talking about that inordinate longing for pleasure or power or possessions you know what I'm talking about first john 2 16 when the apostle says the lust of the flesh lust of the eye the pride of life these are the things that grace trains us to say no to but notice the second part of verse 12 there you see the positive where we should live in this evil world with wisdom righteousness and devotion to god so it's not just to renounce these vices but it's to replace them with virtues to the glory of god that we would be trained to live right in the here and now as it says and in this present age lives that display a changed demeanor with respect to ourselves self-control with respect to our neighbor the second tablet of the ten commandments right with respect to god of course the first tablet devotion godliness piety reverence these are the things that grace trains us in and you realize that the word of god makes ethical demands of us and grace trains us to obey outwardly to say no to these ungodly activities and inwardly to say no to those ungodly desires that we would rejoice with a heart of devotion and love toward our savior to just say no to those things just say no as god enables please understand my message to you tonight is not try harder to be good if that were my message you would most likely fail matter of fact

I can guarantee you will fail but it's to say no to these things as God enables as grace trains you rely on grace to enable you to do these things because if you're born again you are changed on the inside believe that the Holy Spirit is there to empower you to overcome sin are you failing in the Christian life well perhaps you're trying in your own strength remember it's the grace of God that trains you and empowers you for Christian living you know in a seminary missions class Dr.

Herbert Jackson he told how as a new missionary he was assigned a car that would not start without a push and after giving some thought to his problem he devised a plan he went to a school nearby his house and he got permission to take a few of the teenage boys out of class and he had them push his car off and as he made his rounds he would either park on a hill or he would leave running and he used this ingenious technique for over two years until finally after a few years ill health forced the Jackson family to leave the mission field and a new missionary was being sent to come to that station and as Jackson proudly began to explain the arrangement for getting the car started the new man began looking under the hood and before he was done explaining the situation the new missionary interrupted Dr.

Jackson I believe the only trouble here is this loose cable and he gave the cable a twist stepped in the car and pushed the switch and the engine came to life for two years needless trouble had become routine and my goodness the power was there all the time only a loose connection kept Jackson from putting that power to work you know the famous paraphrase J.B.

[20 : 29] Phillips puts Ephesians chapter 1 in verse 19 this way says how tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God I like that see when we make firm our connection with God his life and his power flow through us you know it makes me wonder are you tapped into the power of God perhaps you've struggled to renounce sin and to affirm virtue it's not easy right sometimes it's difficult again is our message to try harder to be good no that's not the message perhaps I can give you some ingenious system for walking Christian victory I'll give you five steps and here are three hacks and here are three tips and that's not the message you see you need to be tapped into the right power supply God's grace that enables us God will enable you to renounce sin and to live righteously left to yourself you will fail you need to come to that realization that you're a sinner and that you need

God's help and when you do that he will enable you he will be there for you his grace will train you as Paul says I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me right we should have that kind of attitude when it comes to our fight with sin 1st Corinthians chapter 15 and verse!

even the apostle realized that it wasn't him it wasn't his running and willing and striving and trying harder to be good but it was the grace of God at work in his heart truly God will empower you as you rely upon his strength but what about when you fail if you fail what about when you sin well remember your acceptance by God is on the basis of Christ's!

righteousness not your own confess your sins he's faithful and just to forgive and in gratitude strive all the more against vice and to affirm virtue as his grace enables you point number two Christmas grace is the grace for Christian living we'll be gone our missionary message Christmas grace is the grace to wait on God look at verse 13 the apostle says while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ will be revealed so note how this grace trains us while we are waiting for this blessed hope that blessed hope refers to the second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ note the two appearances in our text right in verse 11 you have this grace that has appeared and then here in verse 13 you are waiting for the appearing so which is it has this grace appeared or are we still waiting for the appearance of course the answer is both

Christ has come Christ is coming again throughout the New Testament scripture speaks in terms of this already not yet parallel right Christ has already come that's the Christmas message right that's the first advent Christ is coming again that's the second advent our blessed hope you see grace trains us to patiently wait in confident expectation for his return and this hope is called blessed this is where we find our happiness and our delight and our glory because we know that we have been bought with a price and Christ is coming back for us indeed our hope is blessed because it is the rock solid foundation of our Christian walk our hope our faith!

[24 : 13] in God trustworthy faithful life before God the writer of Hebrews puts it this way in Hebrews chapter 6 verse 19 this hope is the anchor of our soul sure and steadfast Paul puts it this way in Romans 15 verse 13 the God of hope that fills us with all joy and peace talking about the object of our hope salvation and eternal life presence of Christ himself victory!

over evil! surely the fulfillment will be blessed indeed and this fulfillment comes at the second advent when Christ returns and our salvation finds its consummation at the great appearing of our God and Savior as it says here in verse 13 our God and Savior what is that referring to?

one person or two? our God and our Savior two persons or God and Savior one person if we have anyone studying here ETS tonight you can get into your Greek you see that it's not ambiguous in the original language it's referring to one person our God and Savior Jesus Christ this text here verse 13 is yet another proof of the divinity of our Savior he is truly Emmanuel God with us and this hope this confident expectation this eager anticipation that we have prepares us for eternity with him and it's a strong hope it's an immense blessing my goodness you don't want to miss it and this is our motivation that we would be called to wait with patience and perseverance on God's promise that we would be manifested with him in glory Colossians 3 4 see that's our blessed hope that we would be like him for we will see him as he is you know speaking of hope a number of years ago some researchers performed an experiment to see the effect that hope has on those that are undergoing hardship and the first time

I read of this experiment I kind of cringed a little bit but you see what I mean there were two sets of laboratory rats that were placed in separate tubs of water and the researchers left one set in the water and found that within an hour they had all drowned but the rats in the other tub of water were periodically lifted out of the water and then returned and when that happened the second set of rats swam for over 24 hours why not because they were given rest but because they suddenly had hope they knew that if they could stay afloat goodness if hope holds such power for unthinking rodents how much greater should its effect be on our lives the text tells us here that this hope is a blessed hope indeed our hope is in a God who will soon return and right all the wrongs and deliver us from evil forever and Christmas is just the beginning of that redemption and so tonight we're eagerly anticipating the consummation of that redemption and in the meantime

God's grace is patiently training us to wait with hope for our final redemption so that means that this Christmas God is calling on you to not just remember our Lord's first coming born of Mary in a lowly stable but eagerly anticipate his second coming as well Christ is coming again but next time he will not appear as the infant child in Bethlehem no the next time he will appear as our great God and Savior and coming King and so let's live our lives in an ever present awareness of the imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ and as we do that we know that this grace will train us to patiently await the fulfillment of all of God's promises to hope not in the things of this passing world but to put our trust in the blessed hope of our coming Savior but so often we don't focus on Christ's return like we should so often our focus is here on the world right was it

[28 : 35] C.S. Lewis who said aim at heaven and you'll get earth thrown in aim at earth and you'll get neither I think there's something to that point number three Christmas grace the grace of our missionary message is the grace to patiently wait with hope for our Lord's appearing and finally point number four the grace of Christmas is the grace to belong look at verse 14 and he gave his life to free us from every kind of sin to cleanse us and to make us his very own people totally committed to doing good deeds this verse is talking about Christian community that we would be members of one another bearing one another's burdens we're talking about Christian fellowship here notice the purpose of Christ's first coming to purify himself a people for his own possession again following the Old Testament pattern I will be their God and they will be my people a distinct people that are separate from the world in the Old Testament you have

Israel as God's peculiar people right they were special to him they were the apple church in the Old Testament Israel is zealous for the law in the New Testament you see that Christ has redeemed us from lawlessness and made us zealous for good works we are the objects of God's favor and blessing and protection because of Christ we are the covenant people of God the covenant community of God and this is the purpose of Christmas to gather this godly community!

us that we would be God's people we would be gathered for our edification that we would be gathered for the glory of God and what did he do for these people he gave himself nothing less than his all by his perfect life his sacrificial death by his glorious resurrection he merited the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts once again you see Paul's pattern you notice the negative!

and the positive negatively he did this in order to redeem us from all lawlessness positively to purify a people zealous for good works negatively to save us from our sin to remove that bondage to sin within us to take upon himself the penalty that was due for our sin we talk about redemption I think you know what that word means right to purchase our release from captivity by paying ransom this is what Christ does right so negatively that's what happens in order to redeem us from all lawlessness positively to purify people zealous for good works what's he talking about there he's talking about sanctification he's talking about progressive growing in godliness and growing in our relationship with God and with one another that Christ came not just to save individuals but to save a people a community a church you know so often our contemporary faith is about the individual right when we're talking about an individualized narcissistic independent eclectic type of spirituality and

I think if you want to be gracious you could say that that might be a reaction to some kind of cold dead orthodoxy perhaps maybe there was an overemphasis in the past on the corporate at the expense of an individualized living faith but I think maybe the reaction is a little bit it seems today the emphasis is too much on me myself and I Jesus is my personal Lord and Savior it's like when I hear that kind of language I know what people mean by that but you realize that's not biblical language nowhere in the New Testament does talk to us describe our relationship with Christ like that but I get what you're saying when we say he's our personal Lord and Savior that's all good that you have a personal relationship with God but don't de-emphasize the church because there is no relationship with God apart from a relationship with God's people because God calls us into community into relationship with him and with his people and that's just the tough part isn't it because church would be great if it wasn't for the people people go to church and they find a sinner and oh church is filled with sinners of course this church is filled with sinners

[32 : 54] I'm seeing a whole bunch of them right here but there's a difference we are not lost sinners we are redeemed sinners sinners nonetheless imperfect nonetheless right but remember who Christ came to save he did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance you see the church is a hospital for sinners not for perfect people so there's no escaping the church Romans chapter 12 verse 4 for as we have many members in one body but all the members do not have the same function so we being many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another God calls us to community he calls us to belong so my question for you is are you plugged into God's community well perhaps I'm preaching to the wrong crowd here because if you're here on Sunday night you're probably plugged into the church but maybe not but please understand this Christmas season is a good opportunity for you to recommit yourself not just to God but to God's most precious possession his people bought with his own blood because

God does not want his people to be alienated from each other isolated and alone and separated he wants to see warm caring relationships in the context of Christian love that we would truly be a community like Acts chapter 2 where and fellowship in the breaking of bread and prayers does this sound like a clue now all who believed were together and had all things in common and so continuing daily with one accord in the temple breaking bread from house to house they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord added to the church daily those who are being saved indeed point number four the grace of our missionary message is the grace to belong all right so how can we summarize Titus chapter two these verses give us the reason why every one of us should keep Christ at the center of our Christmas because God's grace has pierced through our moral and spiritual darkness and has brought salvation to all right this grace of

God is our tutor he is guiding us leading us away from all ungodliness and worldliness leading us in paths of righteousness and causing us to look forward to our final redemption and Christmas is just the beginning of all this because the day will come when our Savior will appear again in great power and glory by Christmas grace we become God's distinct people called out of the world his special treasure on whom he pours his greatest blessings indeed his name will be called Jesus for he will save his people from their sins amen amen