

Has Anything Changed?

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Date: 26 May 2013

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[0 : 00] It's on page 1199 if you're using the red-covered Bible. Let's hear God's Word.

Reminds the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility towards all people.

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.

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.

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, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life.

[1 : 27] This is a trustworthy saying. And I want 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. Peter. Before Peter opens up that to us, we're going to pray, and I'm going to pray for Peter as we do this.

So let's do that now. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for the truth of this letter, your word to us. And we thank you for Peter, for his gifts.

Thank you for this past year, for his opportunity to be studying theology there in the US. We pray that you will continue to bless him in the year ahead to comprehend and understand your word better, but that it would also change his heart and change his life more and more.

And we pray that for ourselves right now, that this would not just be a head exercise, but a heart-changing exercise.

[2 : 54] We pray for Peter, that you would fill him with your spirit to communicate clearly your truth, that we may understand it and apply it and be people who see the greatness and the goodness of God all the more.

So we thank you for him and we thank you for your word. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thanks, Johnny. Well, it's a pleasure to be here.

We're delighted to be back in Ireland and I think as we've been in the States, we've experienced so much blessing over there, but we felt a large part of that blessing is from the church here.

So we've been thinking a lot about you all and praying a lot about you all. So we really appreciate your support and your prayers. Yeah, as we have read, we're going to look at Titus chapter 3, just the first eight verses this week and the remainder of the chapter next week.

So in the past few weeks, we've been working through this short letter that Paul writes to Titus. So we're going to pick up where we left off a couple of weeks ago at the start of chapter 3.

[4 : 16] I think one of the things we've experienced a lot in the States is a huge generosity from people. So within the first week of us arriving, some guy that we had just got to know came over for tea and he heard that I played the guitar but didn't have a guitar and he offered to loan me his guitar for the whole year, which was a great blessing and it's really nice to be able to play and sing.

One of the songs I started singing is by an Irish singer-songwriter called James Vincent McMorrow, which is a real Irish-y name. And the song starts with the line, If this is redemption, if this is redemption, why do I bother at all?

Nothing to mention and nothing has changed. And as I learned the song, I was thinking, is this an appropriate song to be singing? Because it sounds very pessimistic and very sceptical.

But the more I sang it, the more I've realised that that's something that we often feel as Christians.

So we know we have been redeemed, we know the Gospel is true, and yet we look at our lives and

we wonder, has anything changed?

We wonder, why is it that we still seem to have such short tempers with our children? Or why is it that we seem to be so reluctant to obey those who are in authority over us?

[5 : 35] We perhaps see anxiousness in our lives or we see a lack of joy in Christ. And it's interesting because we're not the only ones who ask this question of ourselves.

So you need not think for too long, but when you realise the way that people who aren't Christians think about Christians, they ask this question all the time. So they look at us and they say, well, these people claim to be redeemed, they claim to be Christians, and yet it seems that nothing has changed in their lives.

In fact, it seems they're greater hypocrites than the rest of us because they're supposed to be these transformed people, and yet they live lives that don't give that impression.

We've seen that especially for those who are in roles of authority or who are in public roles. And sometimes the criticism is fair because Christians often do things that are not in keeping with being Christians.

So it's a big question. If we have been redeemed, what change has that had in our lives or what change should that have in our lives? And it's the question, I think, that Paul is dealing with here in the start of chapter 3.

[6 : 47] He asks, what effect does redemption have in our lives? And in particular, in chapter 3, what effect does redemption have in our lives as we live them in society and as we live them in relationship to the rulers and authorities around us?

And the way we're going to open up these eight or so verses is just to think about three different things. We're going to think about what God has saved us from. We're going to think about what God has saved us to.

And we're going to think about what way we should live as a result of those two things. So the first thing we want to see is what God has saved us from. And that's what Paul is dealing with in verse 3 of this chapter.

So he says, at one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

Sometimes with Paul, when he reels off these lists of things, you sometimes wonder, is he just filling space? But as we break them down into maybe into couples of words, we see the different things that Paul is getting at.

[7 : 59] So he says, firstly, the first couple of words is that we were foolish and disobedient. So in other words, we were foolish in our minds and we were disobedient in our morals. So there was a corruption in our minds and a corruption in our morals, the way we thought and the way we acted.

He says, he goes on to say, we were deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. So maybe you could say the first couple of things are internal, they're to do with who we are in ourselves.

But this second couple of things are external, that we were deceived by something outside of ourselves, or we were enslaved by something outside of ourselves, by passions and pleasures.

The third couple of terms, that we lived in malice and envy. In other words, we not only hated people, but we also envied them. We wanted what they had.

We coveted what they had, to use an older terminology. And of course, this hatred, this coveting, resulted in us hating one another and being hated.

[9 : 02] And as we read these things, it's a little bit unnerving and it's a little bit unpleasant to hear about what Paul says we once were.

But I think he wants it to be that. He wants us to feel that there is no escape, that this is a bleak and black picture of who we are, or who we were in fact. And part of the reason he does that is because at the start of verse 4, he says, but, so he wants to draw a contrast between what he has just said. And we see that the contrast is with this kindness and love of God our Savior. Instead of one who is foolish or disobedient, God is kind and loving.

And so as we turn from the bleak picture of who we were to the picture of who God is and the way in which God acted in our lives, there is a stark contrast. And I think there is a contrast not only in who God is and who we were, but there is also a contrast between who God is and who we often think he is.

Even as Christians, who we often think he is. Paul says God is loving and God is kind. And God is our Savior, he says. And when we reflect on these words, maybe we realize that this is not precisely how we thought about God this week.

[10:27] when we woke up in the morning and we considered whether we should commit ourselves to God for the day, did we do it willingly or did we feel that God was a God who was out to get us there, a God of anger, a God who didn't care about us, a God who was distant?

But no, Paul says God is kind and loving and that he is our Savior. I think it's clear that he is kind and loving in the order in which Paul writes these things.

So he says, when the kindness and love of God, our Savior, appeared in verse 4, he saved us. The order is very important because we're sometimes deceived into thinking or enslaved into thinking that because Christ died for us, therefore God loves us.

But what Paul is saying here is that it is because God loves us that Christ died for us. So Paul gives us the correct order of the gospel, I guess, the correct order in which these things have happened. And when we weigh that against other verses that we know, other verses that we're familiar with, we realize that's the consistent message of the gospel. John 3.16, for example, for God so loved the world, that's the source, that's the reason that he sent his only son to die for us.

[11:50] So what Paul is saying is that the kindness and love of God is the source of the gospel. And I think it's interesting that he says, God our Savior, so we're used to thinking about Jesus as our Savior.

But conclusively, Paul says, God the Father is our Savior as well. That Father, Son, and Spirit are all at work in order to save us. And Paul demonstrates this if you look as he goes on through verse 5, it says that God saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

And so what Paul is emphasizing is that this Christian gospel that we believe in is totally different to all other religious beliefs. It's totally different to all other man-made ideas of how we might save ourselves.

Paul says that God saved us. God is the one who took the initiative. These three simple words stand at the very heart of our belief.

They stand utterly opposed to any idea of how we might save ourselves, might be formulated. That God saved us, as it says twice in verse 5, stand opposed to the idea that we can save ourselves.

[13:09] That God saved us makes it clear that we did not save ourselves. That God saved us highlights the personal, the particular nature of salvation. God, our Savior, had us in mind.

When Christ died on the cross, he had us in mind, particular people. And at just the right time, as Paul goes on, this historic event, this historic act of Christ, God the Son, was applied to us by the rebirth, the washing of rebirth, it says in verse 5, and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

So it's a comprehensive salvation. It's a pure redemption by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit in our lives. He responds to our desperate need in love and kindness.

He demonstrates his mercy in the cross of Christ, and he applies it to each one of us who have believed. And so from start to finish, there is nothing left to chance.

From start to finish, this is pure redemption by God. He has saved us from what we were. And the question then for us is how do we respond to this?

[14:23] How do we respond to God's saving work in our lives? And I think Paul hints at it at least in verse 7. He says those who have, sorry, in verse 8, those who have trusted in God.

The only appropriate response, the only ongoing response to all that God has done is to trust in him, to believe him, to have faith in him. As it says in the Gospels and in all of the New Testament and all of the Old Testament, that to turn to God in faith and trust and belief in what he has done in history is the only appropriate response.

Paul says, uses this phrase, this is a trustworthy saying a couple of times in his letters.

In other words, he's saying what he's talking about is worthy of our trust because the one he is talking about is worthy of our trust. God has saved us from what we were is the first thing that we want to see.

The second thing is that God has saved us to what we will be. We're going to be a little bit brief around these points, but I think it's interesting as we read through the Bible, there's things that happen in the Bible that for those people at that particular time, they were still future events, they were still waiting to happen.

[15 : 43] Sorry. Sorry. One of the first things that hit me as I got off the plane was a head cold. God has saved us to what we will be.

So, as we read through the Bible, we see that God makes promises to his people throughout the Bible. He made promises to Israel that they would be delivered from Egypt. And as this future promise came into their present and worked through into their past, they were able to reflect on what God had done and to say, well, this was something that was future and we experienced it and now it is past.

And because it is past, there is a certain sense of definitiveness about it. This has surely happened. But what Paul is saying to us here is that these things that are still future for us, this eternal life, this hope of eternal life in the end of verse 7, even though it's still future, it's absolutely sure, it's absolutely definite, it's as if it has already happened.

And in reality, when we think about eternal life, we realize that this has actually happened to some extent for us. So when Jesus talks about eternal life, he says, eternal life is to know God the Father and to know Jesus Christ who God has sent.

And so when we think about it, if we know God the Father, if we know Jesus Christ whom he has sent, then in some sense we already have eternal life right now, which is an amazing thought.

[17 : 12] But at the same time, there is an eternal life that is still future. We still have to enter into the fullness of this eternal life. We have been reminded this week, horrifically, how sin still exists in our world, how things still happen that disturb us, seriously disturb us, because we have not entered into the kingdom of God fully.

We have not fully attained the eternal life that is set before us. And so there is this sense that eternal life is now ours. God has saved us to this now, and yet it is something that God has saved us to that is still future.

And so as we think about what God has saved us from, as we think about what God has saved us to, we realize that we're between the past and we're between the past and the future.

And so as we consider how we should live accordingly, we will realize that we're affected by both our past and our future. It can be a hard thing though sometimes to think about how we can be heirs of eternal life and this can be true now and at the same time it can be future.

But the word heirs that Paul uses is very helpful in verse 7, at the end of verse 7. When we think about an heir, we realize that a firstborn son or daughter of a king is immediately part of the royal family, so they're immediately their royal lineage, their heir to the throne, so the minute the king dies and the heir to the throne will ascend the throne, which explains partially why there's so many stories about royal pregnancies and things like that in tabloid magazines because one day this little baby, who is only a baby, will rule over a nation either literally or figuratively in some cases.

[19 : 06] But it helps us to understand what it is to be sure of something now, so this heir to the throne is sure that they will one day be on the throne and yet it is a future event for that child.

I don't know if any of you are argumentative, but if you are, you might say, well, what if the heir dies? What if the heir is overcome by some disease or sickness and they can't fulfill their duties? The genius, I think, of what Paul is saying here is that when we think about our being heirs of eternal life or of the hope of eternal life is that all the potential obstacles, all the potential deterrents, all the potential hurdles to our being able to enjoy eternal life have already been removed.

So if we ask ourselves, what if I sin? We can say, well, Jesus has paid for my sins. If we ask ourselves, what if I die? Which is so ultimate and so definite.

God tells us death has no sting anymore because Christ has died in our place. And so we realize that the comprehensiveness, the purity, if you will, or the density of what God has done in the past is matched by the density of what he has prepared for us in the future, the purity of it, the comprehensiveness of it.

[20 : 25] There is no doubt what we have been saved to. And so the final thing we want to see, having thought about what God has saved us from and what God has saved us to, the more practical of you will want to know, well, what does that mean for us?

I think, first of all, we have to reiterate that it does mean we need to believe in these things. So the expectation as Jesus preaches through the Gospels is that you repent and believe.

That's the first, that's the ongoing, that's the essential response to these truths, what God has saved us from and what he has saved us to. But it's not the only response.

And we've seen that already in chapters 1 and 2 of Titus. There are practical things that should flow out of this faith response. And again in chapter 3, Paul highlights some of these things.

You'll have noticed that we started in verse 3 of chapter 3, but in verses 1 and 2 and in verse 8, there are very practical things that Paul calls us to do. He says, remind the people, writing to Titus, he says, remind the people, that is, believers, to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good and so on.

[21 : 45] And in verse 8, he says that we are to be devoted to doing good. Now the reason we've taken these verses last is because we want to make clear the logic of the Gospel.

So we need to realise that the but at the start of verse 4 is very important. It's because God has done all these things in the past and it's because God has promised us all these things in the future that then we seek to live out verses 1 and 2 and verse 8.

And in fact, the whole of the letter to Titus. It is because of what God has done that we are to be subject to rulers and authorities. It is because we are to remember that we were once disobedient and that we have been changed from that life that now we are called to be obedient.

So as a result of the work by God in our lives we are to live differently. Paul reminds us of what we were. Not so that we can be despairing, not so that we can be boastful that we have been changed, but he reminds us of what we were so that we can be conduits or vehicles or channels of the love that we have received from God to those people who are still in a position where they don't know God, to those people who are still disobedient and foolish and enslaved.

So as we look at the people around us in our families, in our friends, in our society, who seem to be rebelling against God, who seem enslaved to work or whatever it might be, there should be a humility because we were once that and it is God who has set us free.

[23 : 24] So Paul reminds us of these things so that we might be now living lives that are reflective of God's love. I think, I guess it can be pretty abstract and it can be pretty hard to get a handle on, but maybe a couple of illustrations will hopefully flesh out the idea a little better that what God has done should affect how we live.

I don't know if you've seen the Shawshank Redemption movie. If you haven't, you should, and if you have, then you'll know the ending. But at the end of that movie there's a character called Red, and Red is Irish I think, and he has been in Shawshank prison for decades, and he's finally been released, he's finally free, totally free, free to the point that if he went back to the prison and asked let me in, they wouldn't let him in, because he's free.

And yet at the same time, there are things in Red's life that he can't seem to shake from his imprisoned past. So when he's working in the supermarket, he asks the manager whether he's allowed to go to use the bathroom, and the manager is getting frustrated because he doesn't need to do this, and yet Red keeps asking whether he can use the bathroom because he's living in a way, even though he's free, he's living in a way as if he was still imprisoned.

So I think that helps us to realise that there are things that have happened to us, we've been delivered from these ways of acting so that we need to no longer live that way, we need to no longer be disobedient or disleaved or enslaved.

I think if we think about the future element of it, a second illustration might help. I don't know if you remember, maybe five years ago or so, Prince Harry was in all the tabloids for all the wrong reasons.

[25 : 18] So Prince Harry over in England was going to a costume party and he wore what was an incredibly insensitive costume, a Nazi uniform, and he was in all the tabloids, in all the broadsheets as well being talked about, and much was written, but at the very heart, at the essence of the problem was that Prince Harry is third in line to the throne of England, husband, and he acted in a way that was not in keeping with how an heir to the throne should act.

We as heirs of eternal life should act in a way that is in keeping with what it is to be heirs of eternal life. We shouldn't act the way we once acted.

We should live lives that are peaceable, we should live lives that are considerate, that show true humility to all men. I guess as we finish, we want to ask what repercussions that has for how we live our lives in Carragalline, how we live our lives in relationship to the government of our country.

I think in Ireland we have a somewhat patchy relationship to leaders in government or in church life or in financial life. We want to ask whether the way in which we relate to our team leader at work or the people that we work with is in keeping what Paul calls us to hear.

It's interesting as we read through verses 1 and 2 that Paul is focusing on rulers and authorities in verse 1 but in verse 2 he broadens the net.

[26 : 57] He says we're to slander no one and he says we're to show true humility towards all men. So if you ask what about the person who cut me off in traffic this morning, who I don't know, I don't know.

Yeah, Paul says no, we're not to slander them, we're to show true humility towards them. What about the person who seems to have a vendetta against me? Paul says yeah, that's included in this category, we're to slander no one and to show true humility towards all men.

And the amazing thing is that as we do this people will see and realise that we have been loved by God, we have been redeemed by God.

There is a pure redemption at work in our lives that causes us to live in this way, in a way that is different to what we were and hopefully in a way that stands in contrast to the world also.

As we finish, I guess, if we're being honest, we are sometimes like Red in the Shawshank Redemption. We do sometimes return to old patterns of life. But I want to encourage us this morning and this passage encourages us that we need not live that way.

[28 : 11] We need not be enslaved to our old patterns of life. We have been saved from our old selves. We can live accordingly. And we are sometimes like Prince Harry as well.

We're living in a way that is not in keeping with people who are heirs of eternal life. And so again, to encourage us this morning that as we look towards the coming week, to keep eternity in mind, to keep this bright, radiant future that God has promised us in mind.

It's true that there certainly are challenges, there certainly is sin going on in our lives. But hopefully as we look to the goal, hopefully as we look to what God has prepared us for, we will be able to live in a way that is in keeping with what he has done in our lives.

We are called to devote ourselves to good. I think that's probably a good summary. As Paul puts it in verse 8, we are called to devote ourselves to good because God has saved us from what we were, because God has saved us to be something entirely different and to enjoy eternal life, to know him and to know his son, our Lord Jesus, forever.

So as we close, I'd encourage us to keep those two things in mind this week as we live in society, in public, as we relate to others around us, that they too might be able to say at some point in the future, I was once like that, but when I knew the kindness and the love of God, my Saviour, perhaps through somebody in this church, I was able to rejoice and realize that he saved me too.

[29 : 54] so let's pray and commit ourselves to God. Father, we're so grateful for the work that you have done in us.

Father, we pray that you would work through us this coming week. We're only too conscious that sometimes we all too often fail to live in a way that is reflective of what you have done in our lives. We are conscious that we all too often fail to live in a way that is reflective of the eternal hope, the eternal life that we have before us, this sure and definite promise that you have given us.

Help us to know your presence and your power as we seek to live out these truths. Thank you, Father, so much for this time together.

Thank you that we can come to the table together and remember once more what you have done for us. In Jesus' name we pray these things. Amen.