

Titus 3:12–15

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[0 : 0 0] to 15. When I send Artimaueus or Ticetus to you, do your best to come to me in Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenos, the lawyer, and Apollos on their way, see that they lack nothing, and let our people learn to devote themselves to do good works so as to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful. All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Well, good morning. So glad that you're with us today. But as we close Titus this fall, I just want to say that I've enjoyed my time in it and trust that you have as well.

Well, we've called the series A Church Worth Joining. Paul had left Titus in Crete to put some things in order so that as the gospel grew in that context, you would find local assemblies worthy of the gospel itself. Today as we finish our series in it, I'm going to try to convince you finally now that a church worth joining works hard to produce good fruit worth tasting. Yeah, you might want to write that down. That's where we're moving. That's where we're landing. A church worth joining works hard to produce good fruit worth tasting. Well, let me pray.

Our Heavenly Father, this little letter has been good for our souls. And I pray that as we look at it one last time, you would reinvigorate our own lives, that our own congregation would be worthy of the gospel we profess. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. On Labor Day, September 7th, 1903, then President of the United States, Teddy Roosevelt, delivered an address at the State Fairgrounds in Syracuse, New York. In it, he stated that there was no room in healthy American life for the mere idler, the man or woman, he said, whose object is to shirk the duties which life ought to bring. And it was in that context that Roosevelt gave us one of his most memorable lines. He said, and I quote, far and away, the best prize that life affords is the chance to work hard at work worth doing. I've loved that line. The chance to work hard at work worth doing. For 11 weeks now, we've witnessed the Apostle Paul tell Titus to declare something similar. Put your eyes right there on verse 14, where we read, and let our people learn to devote themselves to good works. Far and away, this has been the letter's chief concern. It is as though in Paul's mind there's no room in the church worth joining for mere idlers,

[3 : 3 5] Christians who would shirk the responsibility to work hard at work worth doing. I mean, it's been the repeated refrain. Just trace it. Just trace it. The whole letter sits open before you on one page. Back to chapter 3 and verse 8. The saying on these things so that, the saying is trustworthy, I want you to insist on these things so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. It's the same phrase as your eye glances across to chapter 3 and verse 1. Or earlier in the letter, take a look at chapter 2.

Look at chapter 2, verse 7. Even chapter 1 and verse 8. The leaders that he appoints ought to be those who are exercising their lives in ways that demonstrate good works. That's the maxim of the letter. That's the mark. Every Christian on the island of Crete was to have. Not only that they knew the gospel they proclaimed, but their lives displayed the gospel in the good works that emerged from the very goodness of God.

So what are the works? So what are the works? Let me signpost them so you don't get lost along the way. This text in particular highlights three of them. The good works that we are to be known for are that we provide for those in need, we show hospitality, and we continue to fund gospel work.

[6 : 07] It's here in the context of necessities and provisions, namely through the needs of one that is passing through. It's right there in verse 14.

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A church worth joining works hard to produce good fruit worth tasting. This is why on the Sunday following Communion Sunday every week we as a church family take a second offering. It actually goes to meet the immediate needs of those in our congregation who otherwise would be left destitute or have a need that they can't meet themselves. This church family has learned over the years and now decades to find ways to provide for those in need. In fact we've appointed deacons. The deacons in this church, there are many in number, they actually oversee this ministry on your behalf. So they're aware of things, they're made known things, and that your money, which actually supports that, allows this church to find in a very quiet and confidential way that the needs of many are being met. Not only that, you personally meet the needs of many, don't you? I remember Pastor Jackson, Arthur

[9 : 10] Jackson, some of you won't know him, but he served here for ten years. And Pastor Jay used to have this kind of Boaz principle. If you're not familiar with Boaz, he was a righteous man in the Old Testament who owned a lot of fields. And come harvest time, he didn't actually glean, or he didn't actually harvest to the edge of the fields, he left some for those who had need to come and glean. Pastor Jay did that. He and his wife Shirley, they would put a certain amount of money every month from their paycheck, not in their bank, but in an envelope. And he would put it in his pocket and his goal was that by the end of the month he'd empty the envelope as he met people spontaneously with needs. What a wonderful thing to do. I remember one of our early elders who still engaged downtown in the work of Holy Trinity Church, he would buy, I think they were these food passes from McDonald's and other places. So if you like McDonald's, you want to meet Steve Ehrenholz because if you were walking down the street and you were looking for a meal, he actually had one ready for you. You do the same things. You practice generosity to those who need. You and I ought to be making plans where this is part of just the way we live. We meet the needs of others. Those are the good works that in some sense declare the glory of the gospel that we believe. Not only are the good works providing for those in need, but we show hospitality.

Now you're gonna have to stay with me for a moment because I've wrestled this week in these short little verses on some cultural contextual matters that wouldn't be apparent to us as we're reading. I've wrestled this week with some historical contextual matters that I think I've worked out in a way that actually leads to hospitality emerging. But in order to do that, you need to know how mail like this letter would have worked in the ancient day.

In the ancient Jewish world, the manner of sending and receiving mail like this letter, which would have come to Titus on the island of Crete from the hand of Paul, differed than it does in our own city. You don't have the U.S. Postal Service. I mean there was an official Roman postal service, but that was really if you were just state level materials going through Rome direction.

Personal mail like this? Well it went by the hand of somebody who just happened to be going along that way. And so I've wondered this week, who put this letter in Titus's hands? Interestingly, in the old world, there's actually a fragment that we have that our dear professor of classics here David Martinez gave me. And it actually indicates a letter that had been handed to someone in the ancient world and the directions on how they were to get it into the hands of one to whom it was written. This is what it reads.

From the moon gate, this would have been given to the letter carrier, from the moon gate walk as if towards the granaries and when you come to the first street turn left behind the thermae where there is a shrine and go westward. Go down the steps and up the others and turn right and after the precinct of the temple on the right side there's a seven story house and on top of the gatehouse a statue of fortune opposite a basket weaving shop. Inquire there or from the or from the concierge and you'll be informed and shout yourself, Lucius will answer you. And that actually was the note that went in the hands of someone that we still have today.

[13 : 11] You can imagine all those directions being followed by the letter carrier, Lucius! And all of a sudden the one to receive the letter comes out. Somehow this letter written by Paul had to travel from where he was in Macedonia and arrive to the in the hands of Titus. How did he get there? I think it came right there through the hands of Zenos, the lawyer, and Apollos. They evidently were on their way that would make them go through Crete. In fact it couldn't have been what we find in verse 12, when I send Artemis or Tychicus to you do your best to come to me at Nicopolis for I've decided to winter there. It couldn't have been one of those two. He hadn't yet decided who's going to replace Titus on Crete so that he can get to me by winter. In fact we don't know anything else about Artemis. He's not mentioned anywhere.

But Tychicus we do know. And interestingly Tychicus ends up with Paul in Ephesus and Titus we learn about ending up in a town north of Nicopolis. So there's every indication that somebody came and relieved Titus.

He traveled to Paul in the Nicopolis and later Titus goes on north of there to where we read of him again. So Artemis in my mind is the man that never actually brought the letter but replaced Titus on Crete. Which leaves then?

Zenos and Apollos. Titus. A lawyer and a preacher. Now you know everybody's going to need a lawyer at some time and evidently Apollos says the preacher knew he would need one too.

Apollos was an eloquent preacher of the gospel. Evidently these two men are traveling. Paul hands them this letter to get to them. It walks all the way to Titus on Crete and Titus is now responsible to do what?

[15 : 33] To demonstrate hospitality. He says there do your best to speed Zenos the lawyer and Apollos on their way see that they lack nothing.

Having delivered the mail they're in need of a meal. They're in need of a mat to sleep on. They're probably in need of money to carry on beyond their time in Crete.

There are no hotels. No Motel 6. No Tom Beaudet. No Hampton Inn. No Hilton. No Garden. None of it. No Four Seasons. Not in the ancient world.

When you would travel from place to place you were dependent upon the hospitality of those who lived there. and what he's charging Titus with as the bishop of Crete.

You make sure when these guys get there they are finding all they need. The church was responsible to house, feed, support those who were coming through.

[16 : 47] See that they lack nothing. You know there's an interesting connection between good works and hospitality. I mean just look back at chapter 1 and verse 10.

For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers, deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. Well that's actually not the verse I wanted. Look back to 8.

An elder was not to be arrogant, quick tempered, or a drunkard, violent, or greedy for gain, but what? Hospitable. And then right next to it, a lover of good.

The good is connected to the hospitable nature that the church leader ought to have. 1 Timothy 5.10 actually displays this same thing beautifully, contextually.

Listen to this, they're talking about who in the church gets enrolled on the roles to receive provisional needs. It speaks about a widow, verse 10, who has a reputation for good works.

[17 : 56] There's our phrase. If she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, there's our idea. She has a reputation for good works, among them is hospitality.

Look at this. She's washed the feet of the saints. That's what would have happened when someone entered into your home. They would have actually gotten on their hands and knees. They wouldn't have said, let me just take your coat and hang it in the closet.

They would have actually open-toed shoes everywhere. What a nightmare to live in that day. But at any rate, at least for Maine, maybe not for you, but actually the washing of feet was a sign of entrance into my home.

This is the one who does good works. Think about it. Let's sit on it for a minute. What does hospitality look like at Christ Church Chicago?

Our homes, your home, your apartment, your studio, your house, is to be a primary place wherein we demonstrate a willingness to work hard at work worth doing.

[19 : 09] And so the questions emerge. When is the last time we got it up within ourselves to invite someone into our own home?

Some of you might say, wow, that would take me a couple weeks of work to get ready to be able to open my door to anybody. Yes, I understand that. It's very hard for me. I remember one time talking to another pastor in Chicago who has people in his home all the time.

They have a gift for hospitality that's beyond my wildest imagination. I said, how do you do it? He almost had people living with him all the time. I said, how do you do it? I don't have the fortitude.

He said, well, you have an extra room, don't you? And that's all he said. That's how you do it. Now you might say, thank God I don't have an extra room.

But this is a good thing for us. Hospitality. It really has been historically the hallmark of this church.

[20 : 13] It really wasn't until just a couple of years ago that we even had a place to meet. A place like this that we could call home that we could invite somebody into even for a meal or for fellowship.

Imagine for 24 years this church rented a facility on a Sunday morning for an hour or two and besides that everything else took place in homes.

And we don't want to lose that even in all the beauty and the glory and the ease of being able to invite someone to a service. We need to remind ourselves that the good works demonstrate hospitality.

We open our doors to others. We actually might actually come to church on Sunday. Some of you might even do this now and you go, you know, I set aside one Sunday a month where I make a little extra for lunch and my goal prayerfully is to attend church and invite someone home for a meal.

Oh, you're visiting today. Great to have you. Why don't you join me and a couple of friends for a meal? Hospitality.

[21 : 30] Without the visible signs of providing for others or in this case opening our homes to others, the Christian church will continue to be considered kind of through this pejorative notion of just do-gooders by those in the outside world.

You know, a do-gooder that's someone who thinks they're helping people but the they, the people they think they're helping think you're just interfering with my lives in ways that don't matter.

We don't want to be do-gooders. We actually want to do good. We want to do the hard work of work worth doing. Work worth doing, particularly in a multicultural congregation as we have.

I know there's so many people gone this week for the Thanksgiving holiday. But in a congregation like this that we have, there ought to be a sense of my home is the place where I decide to cross lines.

My home is where I open myself up to different cultural distinctions. Just last night some of us were in a wedding in South Bend, Indiana for Grant Hill who was marrying Shireen Antony.

[22 : 49] Shireen, this beautiful bride from her Indian, India and the whole cultural things that went with it. The dress last night was electric.

To watch this boy from Charlotte, North Carolina, mother from southern Georgia, wedding himself to all the cultural distinctions of India in full dress and color.

It was glorious. It was actually a testament to the gospel we profess and the Antony family entertained us in a most hospitable way.

We shared a meal. we shared lives. We heard people speak. This is what this church has to continue to be if it is to in a sense be known for her good works.

We don't only provide spontaneously for the urgent needs of others. We actually self-consciously make determinations to open our lives to others and our homes.

[24 : 00] That's the most difficult thing to say in an urban environment I know. It might even be difficult for your own disposition. Your home might be the one place that I'm finally able to shut everything else out.

But here it is. Make sure you provide for Zenos and Apollos. Make sure they have everything they need. Make sure they have a meal.

Make sure they have a mat. Make sure they have whatever is necessary for their journey. Providing. Opening our homes.

Finally funding gospel work. Take another look at the verb Paul uses when he asks Titus to speed them on their way. Do you see it there?

The verb appears six more times in the New Testament and the meaning always implies money. Speed them on their way.

[25 : 03] It doesn't just say have a good trip. It's what material materially will you need to bring the gospel Apollos you powerful eloquent preacher you.

What do you and Zenos need as you move on from here. They fund gospel work. You can see this very clearly and I'll just read it because I don't want you to have to turn to it but in 3 John 5 to 8 this concept is there.

Beloved it is a faithful thing you do and all your efforts for these brothers strangers as they are who testified of your love before the church you will do well here it is to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God wow for they have gone out for the sake of the name accepting nothing from the Gentiles therefore we ought to support people like these that we may be fellow heirs for the truth you can't your funding of the gospel work for people that you do not yet know strangers even is something that's to be done not just meagerly or piecemealed but actually in a manner as though it were God himself going out from you now think about it we've borne witness to this haven't we so many of you given of your lives to the ministry sending people all of our

GMP partners I think of this I often think and I'm just going to say it now because I'm thinking about it but when we have a GMP partner that means global missionary partner in our midst it happens maybe three or four times a year and they stand up here and Pastor Nhi will get his best thing on and interview them for a little bit I often feel like I often feel that they ought to get the most thunderous standing ovation possible I mean they're going to places that I would never go to nor would you but they're going for the name and when they come into this home and this family we're funding that oh we ought to try to increase that funding where we're able we ought to glory in their going we to show up when our work is to be interested in the proclamation of the gospel beyond ourselves any church that's only concerned for her own needs does not yet understand the good works that are to be done by it and so for us we fund gospel work we don't think merely about our needs we think about the needs of others we don't just think about their material needs or the hospitable requirements we think about the spiritual needs we want people to be going out all over the world from this place with the gospel we planted here 27 years ago in part because we were near a world class university in the historic legacy neighborhood of

Chicago right here Woodlawn and Hyde Park wherein we know people go from here all over the world that actually was an indicator for why to come here because people will be formed fashioned and they will go from here all over the world for the gospel and so what he's arguing here in Titus is that the good works that you have to learn that the people of God can't forget is they got to make sure that they lack nothing what a wonderful thing it is and notice again this is a striking little word in the text our people need to devote themselves to these things I mean this is an ongoing action this spontaneous eruption of generosity care welcome provision sending is ongoing well when do I have to stop giving well the privilege is that you never stop it's your privileged burden to do the good works commensurate with the gospel in providing for all of these things and the real question then is where are you going to get the strength to do this how do you get where do we do all this well the letter has been clear on that so let me just go there for a moment you're going to be able to do these things provide for others demonstrate hospitality fund gospel work because you have beheld the goodness of

[29 : 57] God in your own salvation that that's that's that's the reason underneath all the activity it isn't that good works secure your relationship to God God has secured your relationship to him in all of his goodness and grace and so you live all that out to others that's what's there I mean take a look it's mentioned three times in the letter but I'm just going to show you one last time here today you ought to really look at this and see the kind of language he uses to speak of this kind of thing Titus I'm thinking about chapter three I'm thinking about verses four and following put your eyes on the text follow along as I read it listen to it if you don't have it open he writes but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appear now we've already talked about when did that appear well it appeared in the coming of

Christ but in chapter one verse four it appeared the grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life the saying is trustworthy I want you to insist on it so that those who believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works these are excellent things and profitable things the good works emerge in us because of the goodness of God that's been manifest to us through the preaching of the gospel in which he saved us according to his mercy and it's all been grace given to us that that's the well spring from which good works emerge if you're not a

Christian here today let's be clear nobody in the room who's a believer thinks they entered into a right relationship with God because they did good things I mean did you see how long we rightly paused in the prayer today and now Lord we paused to reflect and to state our sins and we sat quiet and the quietness allowed the mind not just to go okay dismissive move on but oh I guess he really wants us to do some self reflection and to call out dear Lord I need your grace I need your goodness I need your kindness I need your mercy I need you to forgive me that's the gospel every Christian here believes that's a gospel you can have today you don't need to chase God down by being good he is good and in Jesus he chased you down and that then means that the spirit of the living

God is within us and we begin to exemplify what he does richly what he does by pouring out we're able to do it ourselves when you behold God you see the source of your strength when you behold God you see the one who holds the oceans in his hands he gonna supply for you you don't need to worry about helping other people when you see God you see the one who's numbered every grain of sand when you see his beauty his strength his glory his ownership of it all his ability to care for his own then we unhesitantly and willingly and knowingly and voluntarily begin to provide for the needs of others show hospitality and open our homes we begin to fund gospel work because what he did for us we want him to do for the world and when that happens dear family when that happens you you become a church worth joining the goodness of

God which stems from his heart of mercy as evidenced in the extension of his grace and the giving of his son and the costly purchase of his death and the proclamation of the word all of that has come to you do you know that those of you who believe do so because others before you funded the expansion of the gospel some of you who sit here today and maybe so in this place because others funded the extension of the gospel from here in their prayers for the next 50 years the people that explain Jesus to you do so because somebody like Zenos or Apollos or others took the gospel and got it further along but they didn't get it further along on their own they were given help by the Christian family down through the ages this is the way it works and what happens on the island of Crete then is you have churches worth joining and we ought to still have some even in the city of

[35 : 51] Chicago today by definition good works are costly good works require personal expenditure good works are providing for the needs of others that come to you unannounced urgently spontaneously and of necessity that you do something now good works invite people into our homes good works open your wallet not merely your door wow and notice how this letter closes and I'm going to be done with this it closes on a metaphor for good works it comes back to what I told you I wanted to convince you of do you remember did you write it down what I'm trying to do today a church worth joining works hard to produce the good fruit worth tasting take a look at the metaphor there in verse 14 and let our people learn to devote themselves to good work so as to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful he doesn't want us to be unfruitful he closes on the metaphor of fruit fruit worth tasting to be unfruitful is in a sense to be a product of an unproductive plant to be unfruitful think of produce it it's to something was supposed to emerge but the produce never did fruit fruit is always the product of a living entity it's not the entity itself gospel and good works thing it's not the entity itself but it is always the product of a living entity this is why he says you know you're going to know them by their fruits show me your fruit because whatever the fruit is that's an outgrowth of either a living entity or an unproductive entity!

have you ever wondered why every grocery store chain from jewel dom i'm going to try to get yours from jewel dominic's mariano's public's kroger's iga pigly wiggly hanson's holson foods trader joe's and yours! hope maybe i got them all! do you ever notice why they put the produce section inside the front door? it's always first!

first! it's first for a reason these people aren't dumb they're not they're not putting generic cereal boxes on the way in the door they're putting the fruit of a living entity before your eyes with all of its multicolored variety from lemons to peaches to limes to romaine lettuce heads and if you're really lucky the misters are going to let you know that life is still in their midst to iceberg lettuce to cucumbers all of these things are there so that you will walk in the door and say this is an opportunity for health this is an opportunity for goodness somebody's done the hard work of putting something before me that's worthy of tasting now think about think about the grocery stores you know you no longer go to you know which ones how's their produce section?

i walk into a place they got produce on the floor trash everywhere cucumbers you know you pick them up and they look like water balloons they already got it's just already done you're not going back and people aren't going back to institutional church life or local congregations wherein they walk into the foyer which ought to be the produce section of our life and they don't see a people milling about older men younger women older women younger men who actually are producing good fruit worth tasting but that's what the good works are they are an invitation to the world to come and taste something even greater the grace of our lord jesus christ one of my favorites all time when it comes to produce is the hyde park produce market i mean i moved here in 97 lawrence and larry father and son they got that thing in 96 if you weren't around back then you missed it lawrence went by yo-yo back in the day when you entered you'd see all the fresh produce you can still see it today they're enlarged but yo-yo always chewing on a unlit cigar and so he'd have some big box of peaches and he had an unlit cigar and he'd be i just thought this is my kind of place that place this place was so invigorating to this community that that's where we told we were told that's where you got to go now you have more options today you didn't back then but when you walked in there you knew kind of you were at home they only had one register that could take a credit card this again was one of my favorite things you'd get all your fresh produce you'd get to the checkout line and there were like three checkout lines but only the one on the far side the east side had a machine that actually could take a credit card so if you were in the far right side and you were trying to pay for your groceries and you gave them the visa guess what happened to your card they would take it they would hand it to the next customer the customer would hand it to that cashier the cashier would hand it to the next customer they would hand it to the cashier and they would run your card i loved it it felt like family that's that's kind of what i want christ church chicago to be just a small place with fresh produce and lit or unlit cigars just just just a small place where people know the joy of yeah my all i have is is yours what do you need how do we move this thing along how do we get the gospel out what meal can i give what bed do you need who's coming through how do we help that is the book of titus this is the role of good works just inside the door of our church may they find men and women who look like the entities of a live product in all of our multi multi multi variegated color may the quality of our good works because of the time we spent in this letter attract people to the goodness of god for if it doesn't or if it doesn't they will try to be fed our heavenly father we thank you for these eleven weeks in titus

and now we close the letter we thank you that somehow it found its way from paul's hand to timothy's titus's life we thank you that you use titus on the island of crete and we pray that the lessons we learned would help us hold the gospel well here in chicago may we produce the good works because we beheld all the goodness of our god we pray this in jesus name amen let's stand