

Titus 1:1–4

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[0 : 0 0] Again, that's Titus 1, 1 to 4. Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior, to Titus, my true child in a common faith, grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning. Good morning and welcome to the fall and our series from Titus called A Church Worth Joining.

The subject is timely. The series should be exciting for, indeed, all the doldrums of the years of COVID should now be behind us, those days when church became not only a prohibitive thing in our city, but for many, so boring that others stopped coming all together.

Living in isolation over the last years has tricked people into thinking that joining a church or even being in one wasn't worth their time.

People had moved on. They'd adjusted to accomplishing some kind of community online or found that they were fine without any community at all. But now, at long last, even our city, this neighborhood, it seems to me, is emerging from underneath a rock.

[1 : 5 5] People are coming out again. They're remembering again that life is best lived in real interaction in the sense of human relationships.

And it's my hope that even this fall, a collective hunt might be on the way again for people and a place where you can flourish, where you can grow, where you can join, where you can call home.

It's our hope that Holy Trinity, well, that's really taken it back for me. We founded this church as Holy Trinity, but now it's Christ Church Chicago. It's my hope that Christ Church Chicago would become, for you, for many, a church worth joining.

Two takeaways from the book of Titus become clear as we get underway. You can't be a church worth joining without a purpose worth having. And you can't have a purpose worth having without, in a sense, a plan that's worth implementing.

Take note of the two words. They're going to come all throughout the book of Titus. The purpose for which we were made, the purpose, discovering God's purpose, and then a plan, the plan of delighting in living according to that which we have learned, which is why Titus should be exciting.

[3 : 2 0] I think over the next 10 weeks, we're going to discover God's purpose for the church. And in doing so, maybe the purpose for which you have been made. We're going to delight in living according to God's plan.

Actually, there'll be all kinds of ways that we'll look in the coming weeks on how you and I individually can align our lives with God's plan that we might fulfill His purpose.

But notice, purpose before plan. That's the way things work. And so the introduction to the series, one to four, discovering God's purpose.

I hope that's a question that's in your mind. What's God's purpose? What's His purpose for this church? What's His purpose for you? And how do we discover it?

Lewis Sullivan, one of Chicago's celebrated architects, is credited with saying, form follows function. In other words, that design has to come after intention.

[4 : 23] That outline of what you're doing actually depends on the outcome that you're looking at. That the shape of an object rightly submits itself to the substance that it was meant to hold.

To put it as simply as I can, that purpose is the starting point for all planning. Now, if you're involved in city planning, you're aware of that. Chicago's been laid out according to a plan, but the plan executed fulfills the purpose for which the city existed.

Purpose, then plans. What's true for architecture was true for the Apostle Paul. The form of the work that he gave Titus to create on the island of Crete followed the function for which Paul was actually serving Christ.

To put the book as simply as I can, his plans for Crete, or our plans for Christ Church Chicago, come from the purpose that he had been entrusted by Christ.

Look at how he begins the letter. He doesn't appeal to himself by all the terminology that would elevate his command as an apostle.

[5 : 37] He says, Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. Here it is, the first of little prepositions that are meaningful on purpose, for the sake of.

He introduces himself and he immediately says, let me tell you why I'm here. Let me talk about purpose. In fact, I've discovered in these opening verses that these tiny little words that our English teacher gave us under the heading of prepositions, these tiny words are actually signposts that help us discover Paul's purpose.

I want you to look at them. I mean, it might be worth circling it in the new journal you just picked up this morning. These signposts, for, there it is, there's the little word that begins to show purpose.

For, the sake of the faith of God's elect. And then there's a movement of the word in, in a sense, in their knowledge and in the hope of eternal life.

And then there's this word later called through, you'll see it there in verse three, through the preaching of the word. These little prepositions, in a sense, are signposts on purpose.

[6 : 56] Take note of them. Purpose is discovered when you know the reasons for which Paul labored. When you know in the things that describe it and you know through the means that accomplish it.

So let's look at it together in one sense. Discovering God's purpose, the purpose for which we were made begins in that opening verse four.

For the faith of God's elect. The faith. His purpose was for your faith.

Why faith? And what does he intend to convey by faith? Faith in what? What's interesting in this little letter and I'll bounce you into a couple of different sections is it's the faith in the sense that God is out to save us from our sins and bring us into relationship with him and his family.

Our faith is connected to our salvation. I mean, look at what he says there, how he calls God at the end of verse three. He's been entrusted he's been entrusted by something of God our Savior for the sake of the faith of the elect.

[8 : 24] Their faith is in relationship to us having a God who saves. It's not the only time this is going to come. Look at verse 11 of chapter two.

For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people. There it is again the second time. Our salvation is what Paul was actually working toward.

It's what God was doing on our behalf. You can see it again in chapter three the third occasion verse five. He saved us.

Our salvation through faith is what Paul was purposing to accomplish in his work. Faith.

Yet for most of us faith is in short supply. I mean what do you really trust anymore? Who can you trust? So many things that we have had faith in have let us down.

[9 : 28] I could talk to you about friends that you've lost faith in. Family that you no longer are able to trust.

we could certainly talk about political parties or institutions of almost any kind. Our faith, our trust, our reliance, our belief in is at an all time low.

I'm remembered of Sting. Those of you who are younger won't know him but those of us who are older might enjoy the next 15 seconds.

1993, the lyrics. You remember it. You could say I lost my faith in science and progress. I lost my faith in the Holy Church.

You could say I lost my sense of direction. You could say all this and worse. But if I lose my faith in you there'll be nothing left for me to do. There'll be nothing left for me to do.

[10 : 34] He was already in 93 beginning to put lyrics to the notion that we don't have much faith in anything anymore. So what is meant here by faith?

What does he intend to convey by faith? What is the substance of this faith? The next little preposition of purpose anticipates your need and mine to know something about this faith.

Notice what he says. For the sake of the faith of God's elect here it is and their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness.

It's this kind of faith. It's faith in the knowledge of that which is true and in accord with that which brings godliness. That kind of faith.

Let's take these two phrases together and explain these ideas. We should pause here. What does he mean by in the knowledge of the truth? I mean just on its face value according to the text Paul says he was laboring for our salvation which comes through faith and that that faith is connected to that which is the truth.

[11 : 55] That there is something called truth. That there's something called real knowledge. A real knowing. Now the very things we find so difficult to establish in our era.

What do we call it? Fake news or misinformation or the danger of artificial intelligence. All of these things where real knowledge, real truth seems like sand running through our fingers.

But according to the text Paul purposes that God saves according to something that is the truth.

Real truth. T.S. Eliot put our predicament decades ago like this. Where is the life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we've lost in information? And that's the way we all feel. I know all kinds of things but I no longer know what I can actually have faith in at all. But according to the text there's something true.

[13 : 10] All we've been left with is the new maxim, the new axiom, live out your own truth. Right? Haven't you heard it? Speak your truth.

See this is the culture in which you and I are trying to determine whether there's anything true and reliable that I might have faith in it.

But the text is saying that there is a truth about God's purpose to save through faith. The truth is that we learn something about God and ourselves.

look at the way he puts it later in the letter chapter 3 verses 5 and following. This is the truth according to Paul that God saved us not because of our works done in righteousness but according to his own mercy by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out so richly through Jesus Christ our Savior so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

the saying is trustworthy. This is what he's saying is the truth. That God saves us by mercy through Christ and giving us his spirit so that we are justified by grace.

[14 : 33] That's what he wants to know is true. This is the faith that's required. This is what he's actually on about. In other words then that our faith according to verse 3 of our own text or verse 4 is a common faith.

It's a common faith. But beyond it being a common faith it's a saving faith. What is the faith? It's not only common to us all, saves any who trust in it, but it's a doctrinal faith.

It actually holds things to be true. Look at verse 13 of chapter 1. This testimony is true, therefore rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith.

There's something objective about what God has done. He's purposed it. And not only that, it's an active faith. Chapter 2 verse 10, you and I are to be showing all good faith.

It's supposed to be emerging from us. What is the faith? The faith is that God saves through Christ, by grace, and you can trust it. Amen. This indeed is God's plans for you and for me and for our church.

[15 : 47] Not only that, it's a faith, the second preposition then is in the knowledge of the truth that accords with godliness. Just think about that phrase, knowledge of the truth.

The knowledge of truth in accord with godliness. goodness. If we're going to be a church worth joining, we need a purpose worth having, and that purpose worth having actually has to walk its way out into the lives which we are living.

What an inversion. In this text, you and I no longer speak our own truth. Instead, we're asking, speak, Lord, and teach me that which is true.

And that truth has to actually be connected to the way I live. That accords with godliness. Truth is not merely propositional.

It's not merely theological. It's not merely doctrinal. The truth he's talking about accords with godliness means it's practical. It's interpersonal.

[17 : 01] Chapter 2, verse 1, but as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. And then he goes on to talk about the way people are living their lives. Putting those two phrases together then, once we lived our own truth, now we're bent on discovering God's truth.

Once we thought we were free to do as we pleased, but now we see that God has a truth that he expects us to live by. Are you discovering God's purpose for the church today?

Paul labored for our salvation which comes through faith. That faith can be defined on what he has done through Christ. That is true.

You can build on it. And that truth actually accords with the way in which we live our lives. But there's more. There's more to Paul's purpose.

Take a look at the next prepositions. For the sake of, in the knowledge of, but notice, in hopes of eternal life. Do you see it there in the text?

[18 : 08] In hopes of eternal life. What is meant by this? You know, when we think about eternal life, usually we start talking about when and if.

Is there a life after? If there is a life after? Or when will the curtain fall? But that's not his concern here.

He's not talking about eternal life in the sense of when or if it might occur. He's actually using eternal life here in the sense of what? Or the assurance and the certainty of the eternal life.

We know this because of the way he speaks of it. in hope of eternal life which God who never lies promised before the ages began. That's his emphasis. I want to talk about life that you can bank on.

The eternal life, the certainty of it, the assurance of it. And I ask you, do you have the assurance of eternal life? I'm not concerned with when it's going to come.

[19 : 18] I'm not concerned this morning with if it's going to come. But do you have certainty that it is coming? He says it's coming because God never lies.

Every Cretan is going to later be called a liar, but not God. You're a liar. I'm a liar. God's not a liar. And his purpose is to save us by Christ in truth that affects our life that will actually help us enter into life eternal with him.

The only question really remains then is how do you get this? How do you get hold of God's purpose for your life? How do you get hold of salvation? How do you get hold of truth?

How do you get hold of godliness? How do you get hold of assurance? Well, look at the way he puts it here. In verse 3, at the proper time manifested, that is, came to light in, there's another little preposition, in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted.

This is how you do it. This is how you get it. In his word, through Paul's preaching, preaching, in his word.

[20 : 43] Now, if you're just coming on to Christ Church Chicago, this is the reason everything in this church revolves around our reading and coming to a better understanding of the Bible.

Because you cannot know or discover God's purpose for your life unless it is revealed here, unless it comes to light here, unless it's shaped by everything here.

And that's what he says, that this purpose comes to you in his word. So this is why on Sunday mornings we spend 30 minutes or so doing a first-hand look at the Bible.

This is why we ask you to bring a Bible, look at a Bible, get a Bible, put your eyes on a Bible, because in his word you discover God's purposes.

And it comes through, Paul says, through the preaching. This is why it's important to explain to the best of our ability what is the Bible trying to say?

[21 : 51] It comes through the oral proclamation of the gospel. This is what this church centers on and will never move from.

We are discovering God's purpose. In one sense, we're learning this morning, how is it that we would ever have hopes of becoming a church worth joining?

You can't be a church worth joining if you haven't first discovered God's purpose in living. And here he finds a way to communicate to us that purpose.

what is the purpose of God? What is the purpose for your life? Purpose for your life is that God wants to save you through Christ by faith according to truth that would affect a life of holiness and the assurance of an everlasting presence with him.

And to do that, we will give ourselves to the articulation of his word. So as we look to the coming weeks and the rest of the series, we're going to see that a church worth joining not only discovers God's purpose, but will delight in living according to God's plan.

[23 : 21] That's really what verse four begins to provide a transition for. Paul, in a sense, knew that the preaching of his word was insufficient without a plan that local congregations actually lived it out.

And so he says, Titus, you've got work to do. Verse five, this is why I left you there. The purpose has been put down, but the plan must be put into place.

For Crete, the plan would come through Titus. And Titus, he wants all of his readers to know can be trusted. That's why he calls him my true child.

He's legitimate. He's authentic. He's the real deal. He's going to put a plan in place to become a church worth joining that unfolds the very purposes of God.

But today, at the outset, before all the things he wants to say to us, he wants you to know the purpose.

[24 : 31] Don't leave here today without knowing how to articulate to someone you talk to over lunch what this church believes to be the purpose of God for you.

It's simply this. He intends to save us through faith in Christ that we might know the truth and walk in it until we see him face to face.

And if we have that, well, we'll be useful to him on the streets of Woodlawn, helpful to him in the city of Chicago, as others actually learn from us God's plan for them.

In Christ's name. Our Heavenly Father, we give ourselves in the coming weeks to the ongoing discovery of your plans for this church.

And I pray that even this opening word on purpose, which precedes plans would strengthen us in faith.

[25 : 46] And maybe even for some this morning that they would discover, in a sense, for the first time in their life, what your plans are for them, namely their own salvation.

We ask it in Christ's name. Amen.