

But He Saved Us

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Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0 : 00] As we come to the Word this morning, I want to begin with a question. Do you remember what life was like before you came to know Jesus?

Before you became a Christian? Now I know that there are some of you who might be thinking, well I'm here today and I'm actually not a Christian. Maybe you've thought about fully embracing the Lord Jesus as your Savior and your King, but you just haven't brought yourself to do it.

And if that's you this morning, then this question is not really for you. But most of us here are Christians. Do you remember what life was like before you came to know Jesus?

Some of you have been a Christian for decades. Perhaps it was so long ago that you can barely remember what it was like back then, especially if you were raised in a Christian home and regularly attended church from the time that you were little.

Maybe others of you have only been a Christian for a few years. Maybe for you it's easy to remember what life was like before you became a Christian because it wasn't that long ago. And for some of you, maybe how long it's been doesn't really matter because you've never forgotten what life was like before you surrendered to Jesus.

[1 : 22] Maybe the way you lived and some of the choices that you made left such a mark that even the consequences of those old decisions are still felt even today. Do you remember what life was like before you came to know Jesus?

Well, this morning as we come to God's Word, Jesus wants us to be reminded of what it's like to not be a Christian.

He wants us to remember how life was before we believed. He's going to tell us how life is right now for all who are not his people.

And he does this through the words of his Apostle Paul to Titus. We've been working our way through this book, and we're in chapter 3. Let me just read the first few verses of our passage for us this morning.

Titus chapter 3, starting in verse 3. Paul writes, At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.

[2 : 38] We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us.

Not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. So Paul, speaking for Jesus, has written this letter to Titus.

For those of you who are visiting with us and haven't been here for the whole series, Titus is on the island of Crete, and Paul has left him there to put things in order in the churches on the island.

Titus is to install qualified elders in each of the churches. He's to rebuke false teachers who have crept into the churches, and he's to teach about God's salvation, and about how to live good, holy, and upright lives.

Paul has just finished urging Titus, here in chapter 3, to teach 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 always to be gentle toward everyone.

[3 : 54] And now as Paul has been urging Christ's people to live good, holy, upright lives, he now points us back for a moment to reflect on what life was like before we came to believe in Jesus.

He says, At one time, we too were foolish. When it came to spiritual things, when it came to the truth, we were senseless.

We were stupid. Like fools, we weren't seeing things clearly. We weren't thinking straight, and it led us to do many foolish things, senseless things.

At best, just wasting our lives. And at worst, like fools, doing damage and harm, not only to ourselves, but also to the people around us.

We were foolish. At one time, we too were disobedient. The overall way that we lived was not in submission to God.

[4 : 58] We were disobedient. We were doing the things that God said not to do, and we were neglecting to do the things that God said we ought to do. We too were deceived, he says.

This is a powerful word. In our lives before Christ, we were bought into lies, and we didn't even know it. We were like people who had gone off the path of truth and had wandered away and were lost, and we were unable to see even where we had taken our many wrong turns.

In fact, we maybe even thought that we were on the right path. We were deceived. And if that wasn't bad enough, he says, we were also enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.

It's another powerful picture here. He says, we were like slaves. We were like people reduced to servitude and serving our masters.

And who were our masters? Well, the various passions and pleasures that we had back then, they were our masters. We were like people out of control, ruled by our desires, helpless to say no to them.

[6 : 18] We were just kind of driven by this insatiable thirst for pleasures and comforts. It was our passions. It was our cravings for which we lived.

And the decisions that we made, by and large, reflected these enslaving desires. And here again, we notice one of the strong themes of this letter, which we've highlighted a few times.

Crete is the island that's known for laziness. It's the island that's known for a lack of self-control, for gluttony, for drunkenness, as we've heard throughout the letter. And Christ has been urging his people there on Crete to live self-controlled lives.

Don't live that way anymore. And so here Paul is saying, we used to be just like them. We used to be just like everyone else there on the island of Crete. We too were just living to please ourselves, living to indulge our cravings, living to satisfy our lusts.

And we were powerless to do otherwise. He says, we too lived in malice and envy.

[7 : 28] And it's maybe a little bit flat of a translation. I think some of the other ones you guys may have out there capture it better. We were spending our lives, we were spending our lives in malice and envy.

This was an ongoing thing. This was day after day, spending our lives in malice. And malice maybe is not even the right word because we always think malice today.

We think of intention to harm others. But this is a more general word. Refers generally to wrongness, badness, wickedness. So we were just kind of sort of spending our days, day after day, in sin.

And in envy. We were always looking at what others had. And coveting. We were always wishing. We were always wanting.

We were always desiring what they had for ourselves. Hardly content with what God had given us. Always seeing. Always wanting.

[8 : 35] We were hated and hating one another. We come to the realm of relationships. This is how relationships were like before Christ.

Now hate is a very strong word today. And another way this could be translated perhaps is we were despicable and despising one another.

The second statement is quite clear. Despising one another. Hating one another. So the normal pattern of relationships for us before Christ was for envy, was for strife, arguments, conflict, competing desires, lack of respect, and all of these things boiling up and growing to the point where we frequently, often, just despised other people.

And of course, we felt justified in doing so, but probably the first word reveals the truth. We ourselves were acting despicably. We were inviting that hatred and despising of others in the way that we were living.

now this is quite the picture. This is quite the reminder of how life was before these people came to know Jesus.

[9 : 52] And I think a couple thoughts are in order here. It might be difficult to relate to this list if you came to faith as a child. If you were saved as a child and most of your life all you've known is the Christian life, then this list might almost feel otherworldly.

But know this, if that's you, if you had not come to know Jesus at a young age and you had grown up like everyone else, not believing in Jesus, not living for Jesus, then this is what life would be like for you through all that time before you met him.

And if there's any doubt here, I just encourage you, ask some of our newest members here, those who more recently came to faith in Jesus, ask them if this description in verse 3 captures what life was like just a couple years ago.

Next, I think we need to remember that this description may not appear on the exterior of our lives as much as it's on the interior of people's lives.

Amazingly, Paul includes himself in this description. He says, we too, and then he gives this list, which may be a little shocking to us, but at the least, this means that he's confessing that he himself was also like this before he was born again.

[11:20] And if you know Paul's story, I mean, this is kind of surprising. He was one of the Pharisees. He was one of the religious leaders of his day who had mastered the art of living the righteous life, the good, the holy life, at least on the outside, on the exterior.

But inside his heart, he says, we too, I too, was foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to passions and pleasures, spending my days in sin and envy, hateful and being hated.

he was just keeping that all on the inside. He was putting on the facade for others to see. And there's one more reason why some may see this list and just feel like, ah, there's something not right about this.

Let me ask it this way. If a person doesn't believe in Jesus and they read this list, this description on the screen, do you think that they would say, oh, yeah, that's me?

Well, unless God's Spirit is convicting them of this, probably not. Did we think that we were foolish before we came to believe in Jesus?

[12:39] Probably not. We thought we were smart. We thought we were wise. We thought we had it figured out. We were proud. Did we think that we were enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures before we came to faith in Jesus?

I mean, all we have to do is look at a person who's addicted to something today and how many of those people are unwilling even to admit that they have a problem? And that's just an addiction. I mean, there's other kinds of passions and pleasures as we've talked about. Passions is a very broad word. It refers to those worldly desires. It could be greed. A person could be enslaved to that desire to get more of the stuff of this earth, thinking this will make me happy.

And on the outside, everything might look pretty good. But if you were to look at their bank statement, you might see that there's this massive pile of debt all piled up because they've been just buying, buying, buying, buying stuff that they don't need in order to scratch the itch of greed. So all of these things in this list can exist beneath the surface to a measure, beneath the surface of a person's life. And some of us had learned to hide these things pretty well when we were around other people, when we were outside our homes before we came to know Christ.

[13:59] And on top of all this, it says right here that we were deceived. We didn't think we had this problem. This isn't the description that we would have said, yeah, that's me.

But according to God, this was our life. This is how it was until the kindness and love of God broke through and he saved us.

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 Savior, appeared, he saved us. not because of righteous things that we had done, but because of his mercy.

So Jesus wants us to remember what life was like before we came to know him. Or in some cases, what your life would be like today apart from Christ. But that's not all he wants us to remember.

[15:05] He also wants us to remember that God saved us from all that. He saved us. And he wants us to remember why he saved us, how he saved us, and for what purpose he has saved us.

And we see these a little bit in verses 4 to 7 here. Let's start by looking at the why. But when the kindness and love of God, our Savior, appeared, he saved us not because of righteous things we had done.

So the first reason he gives us, not quite the first, but very early on, it's a reason that we're not to think. It's not because I've lived such a good life.

It's not because I've done so many right things that I deserved it or that I earned it. Get that out of our heads, he says. This is why when the kindness of God, our Savior, appeared, he saved us. He saved us because he is kind. Not because of who we are, but because of who he is. He is a kind hearted God.

[16:24] He is eager and willing to do good to people, to help us, to meet our needs. It was kindness that sent the Lord Jesus down from heaven to earth to save us.

And not just kindness, but love also. When the love of God, our Savior, appeared, he saved us. God saves us because he loves us. Do you know that God loves you? That this is why he sent his son?

Because he loves you. So these are the first two reasons. God is kind. God is love. And at the end of the verse, he saved us not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. His mercy. Mercy is that part of God that sees us as we are, undeserving, and yet gives to us anyway, meets our need anyway, despite what we deserve.

[17:42] And if we look ahead a little bit more, there's one more reason in verses six and seven where it talks about how he poured out the Spirit on us. It says that he did that generously. He poured out the Holy Spirit on us generously so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs.

God is a gracious God. He is a generous God. He's not a stingy God who just wants to withhold from you. Just the opposite.

He is eager and happily gives generously for the benefit of those that he has created. So this is the why he saved us. And it's wonderful.

The reason is not anything to do with us and what we have done. It has to do with who he is.

Because of who he is, he saved us.

Because he is kind. Because he is loving. Because he is a merciful. Because he is a gracious God. God. So Paul wants us to remember how we used to live before we were in Christ.

[18:58] Then he wants us to remember what God did through Christ to save us. He wants us to know the why of it. Not because of good we had done, but because of who he is. And we just talked about his kindness, his love, his mercy, and his grace.

And now we come to the how. How did God save us? Paul wants to remind us about that a little bit too. And we read this in verse 5, kind of in the second half of verse 5.

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 Savior.

Paul tells us some of the how that we were saved. And there's a couple things here, at least three things, if not more. And maybe what's surprising to us is that as he tells us this, we're kind of almost expecting that he's going to say the cross, blood, the death of Jesus.

And he doesn't. Those things are mentioned in other places, and they are part of the how. But Paul wants to focus here specifically on one thing, and it's the work of God's Holy Spirit in his people when they first come to be saved.

[20:17] He wants us to know about that, to be reminded of that. And so we see three things, three works of God's Spirit here mentioned. He saved us first through the washing, the washing of rebirth.

As I've said on other occasions, sin is that which defiles us. It makes us unclean. It makes us dirty in the sight of a holy and perfect God.

And so we have this need to be cleaned, to be washed, to be cleansed, not physically, but spiritually. God saved us by washing us clean.

And there are some who think at this point that Paul is talking about water baptism. I don't think that's right. I think that Paul is talking about the thing that water baptism points to and that's the washing that the Holy Spirit does to each of us when we are saved.

Do you remember what John the Baptist said? John the baptizer said, I baptize you with water, but there's one who's coming after me, talking about Jesus.

[21:32] He will baptize you. He will wash you with the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Spirit. water baptism is the lesser thing, the physical, the outward thing, and it points us to that kind of washing that the Spirit will do for all of Christ's people when they first put their trust in him.

So that's the first thing, washing. The second thing, he saved us through the washing of rebirth. There's talk of rebirth here.

Now, maybe your translation is a little different. There are quite a few that say regeneration, but I actually think that rebirth is such a good, insightful translation here. This is probably all Greek to you, but the word used here, it's a compound word.

It's a word made up of two pieces, and if you would just go with the literal meaning, again, born. born. It's just stuck on the front is the word again, and then it's the verb to become, which usually, in reference to people, it's to be born.

It's the again birth, and so rebirth, it really does fit here. Regeneration, it works too. It captures that idea of new life, but it's maybe a little less personal in our day today.

[22 : 57] When we regenerate, we might think of charging up a device or something like that, but rebirth, on the other hand, I mean, what's the metaphor that Jesus himself used when he was talking to Nicodemus?

You must be born again to enter the kingdom of God, said Jesus. So I think this is a great translation. This is the second thing that God has done to save us. He has caused us to be reborn, to be born again.

He has given us a new life by his Holy Spirit, and the emphasis here is on the complete and total change, utter transformation by the Spirit working in us.

That's what rebirth is, it's complete overhaul. And just as with the washing, this is something that God does in everyone who he saves. He changes us by his Spirit's power.

He makes us radically new. The third thing mentioned here is that he saved us through renewal by the Holy Spirit. I think this is just another way of saying the same thing, just kind of coming at it from a parallel wording.

[24 : 11] God has saved us by going to work on us, in us, by his Holy Spirit in a way that makes us new. We are renewed.

The old way of life that he's been describing in verse three, the way that we once were, well that no longer fits with who we now are because we've been made new. This is how Paul puts it in his letter to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17.

He says, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone. The new is here. And it's wonderful.

When we're newly saved and converted to Jesus, boy do we feel it. Old desires begin to die. New desires come in and take their place.

The allure of what is dark and evil diminishes and our love for what is good and right increases. Now it doesn't mean that every temptation goes away or that we never sin again, but it does mean that we just no longer fit that old way of living anymore because we have been deeply and profoundly changed by God's Holy Spirit who has come to live inside of us.

[25 : 29] And this is what happened when each of us first believed in Jesus. I mean truly believed in Jesus. We were changed. We were renewed by the Holy Spirit.

We were reborn. And I'm just going to quickly pick on Thomas Hoffer here. Just a few, well it's a little ways ago, over a month now.

He was baptized in January and shared his testimony with us. And hopefully I'm capturing it right, but you fell on the bed in the hotel room in utter desperation, sick and tired of the emptiness and hopelessness of that old life described in verse 3 here.

You called out to God and when you woke up you felt like a brand new person because God had done that work of making you new. That's what it looks like. Such an utter change and transformation that even Tom's wife Alicia was thinking, what on earth has happened to him?

He's not the same person. That's what rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit looks like. And that's what God does in our lives when he saves us.

[26 : 43] So the picture that we get here, let's bring in that little extra bit that comes. Renewal by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.

The picture that we get here is God up in heaven above pouring out his Holy Spirit down from heaven to earth on us. Both Father and Son working together giving the Spirit in order to save us. And notice the metaphor here. He poured out on us richly, generously, I know I kind of mentioned this before, but when God saves us, he's not stingy.

He doesn't look at you and say, oh, I see the life that you've lived. I'm just going to give you a little bit of my Spirit. No, he pours the Spirit on us lavishly, generously, richly.

He's a gracious, giving God who loves to give. He doesn't think about the cost. He says, it's absolutely worth it because I love you. I want you.

[27 : 51] So these are the three things mentioned here God has done for all of us who have put our hope in Jesus, who have come to believe in Jesus. And these are works of God's Spirit in us at that initial point when we first become a child of God, when we first believe in Jesus.

Lastly, we want to notice that final thing. He has saved us. We saw the why. we saw a little bit of the how, and now he's going to tell us for what purpose.

For what purpose? In verse 7, he has done all this so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life.

think of the richest man in the world for a moment. Think of Elon Musk. I know that he just got passed by someone else, but it changes so often. Just everybody knows Elon Musk.

Think of what it would be like if he called you up on the phone this afternoon and he said, I'd like to put your name into my will so that you would inherit a portion of my \$200 billion fortune.

[29 : 09] You wouldn't even believe it. You'd think it was a scam. Something too good to be true. And it is. He wouldn't do that. He doesn't even know us.

But God would do it. He would put your name in. He wants you. This is the whole goal. He saved us so that we might become heirs.

He wants you to inherit many wonderful blessings, many good things, and Paul just puts the spotlight on one. eternal life.

What is God known for? He is known for being the everlasting God, the one who lives forever. And he wants to give of that, that life to you.

That's why he has done all this, so that we might become heirs, so that we might be able to look forward to inheriting this wonderful gift of life forever with him.

[30 : 19] I love this. Sometimes we just get it in our heads that God just hates our sins so much that he just wants to get it out of his sight. And that's why he died for us.

That's why he's done all this washing for us. But it's more than that. He's made us clean. He's washed us. He's utterly transformed us so that we can have this new life with him forever.

He wants you. Verse 8, this is a trustworthy saying, says Paul, and I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. So Paul says, Titus, teach these things. Stress them. Emphasize them. Declare them.

This is the wonderful truth of our salvation. Tell the people that God has done this for them. Remind them again. Remind them of the why. Remind them of the how. Remind them of what for.

[31 : 26] And then at the end he comes full circle again to this little bit. Teach these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

The gospel leads us to then live out a life of goodness, kindness, love towards others. That's one of the themes of this book.

The grace of God teaches us to say no to ungodliness and yes to a self-controlled upright holy life in this present age.

And so I want to just remind you today of who you used to be before you met Christ. I want to remind you of what you would be today apart from Christ.

And I want to remind you of what God has done to save you. He loves you. He is kind. He is merciful. He is gracious.

[32 : 35] He poured out his spirit. He caused you to be reborn and renewed Christian. And he's done this so that you can be his heir and enjoy life with him forever.

This is the gospel as we see it here in this passage. church. We're going to go to the Lord's table now. And I don't want to preach a whole other sermon on top of this but this gospel, these wonderful gifts, this good news, it was bought and paid for for all of us at the cross.

He didn't mention the blood but we know from other passages that we would not have this right standing, this justified, having been justified by his grace apart from the blood of Jesus, apart from his death to atone for our sins.

And so that's what we're going to reflect on for a few moments here as we go to the Lord's table.

And if you're visiting with us, feel free to partake. If you believe in the Lord Jesus and he is your savior, feel free to partake.

And if not, then just let the cup and the bread pass you by. We're going to take a couple minutes to just pray and reflect quietly. And then after I've done that, we'll have Charles and Rod come up and they will serve us the bread and the cup.

[34 : 01] The bread represents Jesus' body and the blood, the cup represents his blood. So let's reflect on what Jesus has done for us and then we'll partake all together once everyone has been served.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.