

My Master and Commander

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[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 8th of February 2004 The preacher is Paul Barker His sermon is entitled My Master and Commander and is based on Titus chapter 1 verses 1 to 4 God our Father we thank you that you so inspired the Apostle Paul to write to Titus words that were not only applicable and useful for him but also for us to rebuke us correct us and train us in righteousness We pray that as we come to this letter tonight and in the weeks to come that you will fill us with truth, faith, hope and let our practice be full of godliness as we await the day of Christ

Amen Dean Brown was a troubleshooter You may not have heard of Dean Brown It's a fairly common nondescript name so you may have heard of him and have completely forgotten about him but some of you might be too young to have known about him Dean Brown died a couple of years ago in old age but in 1970 he was sent by the United States government as a diplomat to Amman in Jordan Amman in Jordan or Jordan the country was in the midst of civil war and Dean Brown was a troubleshooter sent by the US government to try and bring some sort of peace in Jordan Now he must have been relatively successful because in 1975 he was sent to Cyprus which was also in the middle then of a civil war as a diplomat immediately after the US ambassador to Cyprus had been murdered or assassinated and then in 1975

I think he was brought out of retirement in 1975 because he was again called upon to be a troubleshooter 1975 was the fall of Saigon in the Vietnam War and he had the job of trying to bring order to the chaos of the flood of refugees out of South Vietnam in 1975 1976 again brought out of retirement as a troubleshooter he was sent to Beirut in Lebanon the capital of Lebanon again in the midst of a civil war and again in the context of various diplomats and US people being assassinated in Lebanon Dean Brown was a troubleshooter sent to solve problems big problems and maybe even be sort of not heavy handed but very strong in the context of solving those problems indeed he was known to carry his own gun because he said I'm not going to be taken hostage even if I can't shoot accurately I might as well make a noise or troubleshooters are people who are sent to clean up problems and especially we see them from time to time special envoys sent by governments or the United Nations to Baghdad or to Belfast or Dublin or Moscow or to Sierra Leone or other parts of the world where there is all sorts of trouble but it's not only international troubleshooters there are corporate troubleshooters remember Jonathan Shear the troubleshooter sent to solve the ABC and in the end he created more mess than he had when he started and he was sort of sacked sent on his way the ABC is still recovering or John Stewart you might have heard his name in the last week the new CEO or whatever he's called of the National Australia Bank

I suppose in a sense appointed to be a sort of troubleshooter to try and resurrect and rescue some of the dilemmas of the National Australia Bank that led to its previous CEO resigning or perhaps as some say being sacked you can even find on the web www.troubleshooter.com and if you go to that or to its associated United States radio show then you can find troubleshooting solutions for all your consumer problems whether your house is okay how to buy a house all your patenting problems I actually thought at first when I looked at it on the screen it was parenting problems but actually it was patenting problems and there's a latest feature article on their website that may be of relevance to you is my furnace safe for winter well who cares on a day like today really and I suppose sometimes there are sporting troubleshooters I remember when the Australian cricket team in 1978 or thereabouts called on the very ancient

Bobby Simpson to come and rescue the Australian cricket team England did the same with Colin Cowdery when he was even more ancient a few years before and I guess today we were hoping that I think it didn't happen that Leighton Hewitt might be our troubleshooter in the tennis and so on well there are international troubleshooters corporate troubleshooters sporting troubleshooters all

sorts of troubleshooters and there are church ones as well sometimes churches are in messes more times than we recognise probably and so a minister a consultant somebody is sent to be the troubleshooter to sort out the mess and Titus was a troubleshooter that's his job it seems his role he'd already been Paul's representative in Corinth a church that had all sorts of troubles in its midst you only have to read 1 and 2 Corinthians to see that and in 2 Corinthians the fact that Titus goes to Corinth and is there as a troubleshooter is clear he's also got another job of arranging a collection for the poor in Corinth but now when Paul writes this letter to Titus

[5 : 57] Titus is in Crete an island in the middle of the Mediterranean some say that the Philistines actually originally came from Crete though we're not quite sure about that and he's been left behind deliberately by Paul in Crete as next week's passage tells us to help sort out and solve some problems in the church in Crete Titus is a beloved protege of Paul he along with Timothy seem to be his two chosen protégés if you like trainee ministers that Paul saw become Christians trained up and left in charge of churches in different parts of the ancient world so the greeting to Titus is quite affectionate in verse 4 to Titus my loyal child in the faith not his own child Paul's child but his loyal child probably implying that Paul had some role in the conversion of Titus to the Christian faith to Titus my loyal child in the faith we share the common faith literally that is he's testifying that Titus' faith is Paul's faith and that Titus is loyal to that faith grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour well as I say

Titus is a troubleshooter and he's left behind deliberately by Paul in Crete in order to bring about some resolution and solution to the problems that church was facing big problems problems of belief and problems of behaviour striking to the core of the church problems of serious division between two different factions at least within the church not just on personal levels but at the heart of the gospel so we're dealing with a letter that is seeking to buoy up Titus' role as a troubleshooter in Crete there's a lot to learn for us here because the church in Crete is in a mess and it's not unique there are churches all over the world for the last 2,000 years that are in a mess so it's not unique and the words of Paul to Titus are words that well apply in our day and age and for us as well Crete had a reputation for liars for lazy people and indeed also for its vicious culture we'll see a little bit more of that in the next couple of weeks as well but that culture of the people of Crete Cretans literally I suppose spilled over into the church so the church was full of lies it was full of vicious attacks and it was full of laziness and so Paul's charge to Titus in this letter is to troubleshoot some of those problems in the church in Crete Titus is there to sort it out and this letter is to bolster him in that task it's a task that needs strength it's a task that needs clarity and sharpness of belief it is a task that needs obvious and uncontrovertible godliness in behaviour it is a task that needs wisdom and tact as well so that's the purpose of this letter to support and bolster up Titus for his troubleshooting task but as I say the church in Crete is not unique there are churches even in Paul's day and other places and in every age ever since including our own age where there are churches that are in a mess because there are plenty of churches around where false teaching happens regularly if not weekly or daily from the pulpits of those churches where wrong things about the gospel are taught and believed or where the truth is not actually valued as important and so everybody is free to believe whatever they want to believe and you don't need me to tell you that there are churches in our day and age in our city as well that not only are full of false teaching but they're also full of false behaviour when I say false behaviour

I mean ungodly behaviour behaviour that doesn't honour God that doesn't obey God that doesn't love God and doesn't love our neighbour as ourself as we ought but sadly all too often there are no troubleshooters to solve the problems the hierarchy of too many churches is either too weak or too blind or too impotent to send in the Tituses of our day and age to bring about a correction of belief and a correction of behaviour and to heal the divisions that strike at the heart of the gospel and so too often false teaching and false behaviour and rampant divisions just continue on unchecked in churches not only in our own city and country but around the world as well there's much to learn from this letter because these are battles worth fighting Paul considers it absolutely worth the effort the hard work and labour to save the church in Crete from division from wrong teaching and from wrong behaviour it's worth the effort he doesn't turn a blind eye he's not too weak not to send a troubleshooter to that spot so there is there is teaching here for us to steel ourselves for the fights ahead

I don't mean fisticuffs and I don't mean hatred and spite I mean fights for the gospel truth about Jesus Christ and for godly behaviour and for unity in Christ's church they are issues worth fighting

for typical in the ancient world when you wrote a letter you didn't usually start dear Titus well if that's the person you're writing to I mean you would start with your own name maybe a brief comment about who you are if needed then the name of the person to whom you write and then some greeting before the body of the letter in many ways that actually makes more sense than our letters how many times have you got a letter that says dear Paul well you probably haven't got many unless your name's Paul but you know what I mean and you think who's this from I remember getting one and waiting through three pages before I found at the bottom Tim this is a few years ago now and I thought I didn't know any Tims well I didn't then and we're trying to spend ages trying to work out who it's from it'd be much simpler if at the top it said who it's from this letter is from Tim and this is who I am so you remember then who it's to to Paul greetings and then the body of the letter so the ancient world letters actually make more sense than our own the letter begins then with the writer's name

[12 : 48] Paul the Apostle Paul the Paul who features all the way through the New Testament after the Gospels in such a prominent form one of the chief apostles the chief Christian missionaries after the time of the resurrection of Jesus whose conversion stories told three times in the Acts of the Apostles whose sermons we can read several of them through the Acts of the Apostles and who wrote several letters that we find in the New Testament as well as letters that are lost to us today he describes himself in two ways complementary ways firstly he says I'm a servant of God the word servant is also the word for slave it's a lowly word indeed it's not a term of honour he is a person who is under the thumb he's under obligation to God who is his master but not only is Paul a servant of God he is also an apostle of Jesus Christ and the two are not in competition because God and Jesus Christ are on about the same thing if you look down at the end of verse 3 it says God our saviour and in verse 4 it says Jesus Christ our saviour that doesn't mean that God and Jesus Christ are totally the same but it's certainly encouraging us to believe that Jesus Christ is divine part of the Godhead so Paul is two complementary things he's a servant or slave of God under obligation he's an apostle of Jesus Christ now an apostle is a messenger but it's perhaps a slightly more technical term here a specifically authorised messenger and even witness of the resurrected

Jesus Christ Paul is an apostle because he saw the risen Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus when he was converted he's an authorised messenger so he's making it clear to Titus but not only to Titus because the point of this letter is really for the sake of the church in Crete he's saying I have authority I'm a servant of God but I have the authority of Jesus Christ in proclaiming the gospel as an apostle he's both humble in saying he's a slave or servant he also acknowledges his authority responsibility and both of those things carry responsibility Paul never shies away from responsibility as a servant of God and as an apostle of Jesus Christ he carries great responsibility for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of people now if anyone is considering Christian ministry and some of you ought to be then take heed of this because Christian ministry is a serious business not that Christian ministers today are apostles in exactly the same sense as the apostle

Paul was a witness of the resurrection but there is a sense in which the same gospel is entrusted to Christian ministers and Christian ministers are also servants or slaves of God under obligation the responsibility is great people today shirk responsibility we're not keen to be responsible for too much so we become erratic in our commitment because we don't like responsibility we're reluctant to volunteer for things because we don't want to lock ourselves into responsibility and commitment perhaps we only do things if we feel like it we lack punctuality because we lack responsibility we shy away from the hard tasks that we might be called to do the Christian minister cannot afford to do that Christian ministry carries serious responsibility you can't avoid the hard tasks you can't avoid commitment you can't be lacking in punctuality you can't limit what you do to what you feel like doing to the pleasurable tasks and the easy jobs

Paul's responsibility leads him into difficult areas to difficult tasks it would be much easier for him not to have left Titus and much easier never to have written this letter to say forget the church in Crete it's a tiny pokey little island anyway who would ever want to go there apart from holiday makers in the 21st century but Paul's responsibility as a minister drives him to write this letter for the sake of the church in Crete as much as for the sake of Titus so there's a first little lesson I guess for people who are thinking about Christian ministry there is great responsibility it is not an easy task well Paul next describes the purpose of his being a servant and an apostle why what's the job task or the job description if you like what's he there for what's he on about his statement of purpose let

me say is much bigger than many Christian statements of purpose that you find around the traps whether a statement of purpose of a mission society or a local church or a denomination or whatever all too often we have too small an idea of what our mission task is

Paul doesn't you see it's common these days to see mission tasks for churches or church organizations or groups to be along the lines of to preach the gospel in all the world or to see people converted they're not bad things but actually Paul has a bigger task in mind not only to preach the gospel and not only to see converts in the end that's a shallow purpose it's only the beginning and not the end now Paul's purpose is for conversion as you see in verse 1 as it goes on to say for the sake of the faith of God's elect that is to bring people to faith is what he's really saying there the reason why Paul is a servant of God and an apostle of Christ is firstly only for seeing people converted to faith God's chosen people is the elect Paul deliberately here uses Old Testament language because as we'll see in two weeks time I think it is there is a big issue in this church between how the

[19:16] Old Testament is to be understood and who really is or does belong to the people of God and Paul is using Old Testament language to apply to the people of God not just Jews by race but those who have faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ but more of that in the next couple of weeks but you see Paul's mission task doesn't just stop at saying to bring about converts to faith because then he goes on to say his purpose is for the sake of the knowledge of the truth so that adds a little bit that is that the people who benefit from his ministry have knowledge of the truth of the gospel is what's being implied there the truth of the good news about what God is on about as our saviour what Jesus Christ is on about as our saviour to bring salvation and eternal life they are matters of truth and Paul wants people to know the truth not just to have some airy fairy sort of idea

I'm not really sure how it all connects but hopefully in the midst of all I'm okay but to have clear knowledge of what the gospel is what God is on about what Jesus is on about what salvation is on about and the hope of eternal life but more of that as we see in the weeks to come but Paul's purpose is not just for an accumulation of head knowledge of truth Paul's purpose is not just that our minds are filled with all sorts of memory verses from the Bible and where an Old Testament reference applies to here and all that sort of stuff he's not wanting us to have our minds filled with dates and names and all that sort of stuff it's not just head knowledge because as he goes on to say he is a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the sake of the faith of God's elect for their conversion and the knowledge of the truth that they understand the gospel and know it that is in accordance with godliness now perhaps we might even say probably is the way this is meant to be understood that this is the purpose the knowledge of the truth which leads to or produces godliness you see Paul's not on about head knowledge for the sake of head knowledge it is knowledge of the truth for the sake of godliness in behaviour and you don't see that in many mission statements today it seems to me to faith and knowledge belong godliness godly behaviour christ-like behaviour you see that's where christian faith gets expressed in godly behaviour it ought to be evident it ought to be seen in people's lives that they're christians because they're godly gospel truth is not abstract truth it's not just head knowledge it's not just philosophical ideas that sound good it's about making a practical difference to our character our words our action our use of our possessions and so on notice then too that the gospel is not just about doing good it's not just about being nice people being loving people godliness comes from the gospel godliness comes from the truth about god and about jesus and about salvation and about god's grace godliness comes from the same gospel that converts us now we'll see more about that in about three weeks time or four weeks time i can't remember when but a very important point that the gospel that converts is the same gospel that leads to godliness because conversion is not the end of the process conversion is for the sake of leading to godliness in our behavior that we are like christ in our attitude and our character that's what it's about paul expresses it differently in the letter to the romans but the same idea when he says for the obedience of faith it's not just for faith about something that we believe it's for obeying the faith for expressing godliness now that i think is one of the most underdone under preached understated themes in modern evangelical christian faith too often it's about knowing truth and getting our theology right but all too little attention paid to the godliness of our behavior and character and the result churches too often that fall apart at the seams they might teach truth but the people are not loving the people are not godly the people are not united the people are not winsome sadly far too often but more of that too as we go through this letter in the weeks to come well as a minister

here at holy trinity i could satisfy myself that my job is to preach so every sunday morning or afternoon or evening i'll get up here and i'll just preach and i'll make sure that i teach the truth and that's my job and i'll sit down i could add a dimension to that and say that my responsibility is not just to preach but to see that people learn the truth and learn what i preach but following paul's example there is yet the added dimension that my responsibility as minister here as the vicar of this church is not just that people are converted important though that is and fundamental though that is it's not just that people know the truth and understand what the gospel is can explain it and see what god is on about though that's important and fundamental too but the third dimension if you like the deeper dimension is is that the people under my charge here live godly lives as a result of the gospel and i suspect that's the hardest task of all of those things it's also the element of responsibility that it's easiest to shy away from as well here's a little summary to remember god's gospel goal is godliness it happens they all begin with g but in some ways it's a neat little summary of what we're looking at tonight god's gospel goal is godliness not just converts but godliness now it's intriguing that even in our age of spin in our age of relativism and post-modernism truth still matters don't be conned by those who say truth doesn't matter it does matter you can see it in the debates about the tampa crisis and the struggle that howard and blair and amongst others are facing on the issue of intelligence about iraq what was the truth what did you know and so on yet too often people seek to sideline the truth they cover it over and cloak it over with all sorts of spin they don't answer the questions properly and so on but really spin is just another way of saying lies and deceit and cover-up well the people of crete had a reputation for lies you can see that in verse 12 if you look across to the other page cretins are always liars but in pointed contrast to the people of crete being liars we read in verse 2 that the point of Paul's ministry leads on to say in the hope of eternal life that God who never lies promised before the ages began Paul is fighting for truth for gospel truth in this letter and to this church truth matters and therefore lies matter lies a part of ungodliness rather than godliness and the way he writes verse 2 is to put it to opposite extremes God who never lies and the people of crete who are renowned for their lies whom are you going to trust the people of crete and bow to their demands or God who never lies see christianity is not about what feels good it's not what about it's not about what works for you it's not about what spin you might place on your life christianity stands or falls on whether it's true and if it's not true it's an absolute waste of time for all the buzz you might get out of coming from church and going to bible study and coming to working bees and all that sort of committee meeting stuff it's a waste of time if it's not true and if it's not true well I probably of all people I'm wasting huge amounts of time but it's because I'm convinced that it is true and the truth matters that we hold fast to it however we feel whatever we feel however we're bruised by other people however much the church lets its down it's true and so we stick at it and that's the fight that Paul's on about in effect here he says in verse 2 that this is this gospel is in the hope of eternal life that God who never lies promised before the ages began so Paul is saying that long long long time ago well before the ages began before creation began God made promises now in effect the earliest promises we see are very early in the old testament they're not new to God then he in effect had worked out those promises before he made anything because he'd worked out sending Jesus before he made anything but only now Paul says in verse 3 have those promises been fulfilled or been revealed that revealed that is they were made a long time ago but now he says in verse 3 in due time at the right time in God's time God revealed his word through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our saviour the promises of eternal life were made eons ago by God but Paul is saying only now have they been fully revealed how only now in Paul's day have they been fully revealed we might expect him to say because Jesus came and there we see those promises being revealed and that's the sort of language we do find in other parts of the new testament promise of the old testament now fulfilled or revealed with Jesus coming but what Paul says here is astonishing he doesn't say they're revealed or fulfilled when Jesus came he says the promises of eternal life made eons ago before the ages began are revealed in his preaching of the gospel or in the preaching of the gospel in [30 : 46] Paul's day that's where those ancient promises are bearing fruit when the gospel is preached the gospel about Jesus Christ who has appeared but it's in the preaching of Jesus in Paul's preaching of Jesus in any apostle or any ministers preaching the gospel of Jesus that the fruit of those ancient promises is now being evident or becoming seen where is fulfillment found in preaching the gospel what a responsible task if you're a minister then to make sure that you preach

the gospel aright because those ancient promises are dependent upon it in a sense for their fulfillment and for the sake of those who will hear that they may have faith knowledge godliness and hope what a what an awesome responsibility then it is to preach the gospel we're not doing an everyday mundane matter-of-fact sort of job we are a key in the eternal purposes of God when we preach the gospel now of course by this proclamation and preaching

Paul doesn't mean standing at a pulpit like I'm doing only though he includes that he also means proclaiming the gospel one-to-one with your friend your husband your wife your neighbor your children your grandparents with your school friends your uni friends with anyone when you're explaining sharing proclaiming the gospel one-to-one in a small group in a big congregation in a public meeting on a street corner in shopping town before Christmas you are a key in the eternal unfolding of the purposes of God what a responsibility but that's God's plan that those ancient promises of eternal life would bear fruit when the gospel of Jesus is preached and proclaimed how important then for ministry not just for the ordained minister but for the ministry of any and every Christian to be able to share and to preach the gospel and to see it as such a linchpin in the unfolding plan of the eternal purposes of God we live in a society where for many people truth doesn't matter where for many people spirituality is a feel-good exercise a pick and mix we live in a church where the truth is not always taught where all sorts of immoral ungodly practices are condoned or even encouraged we live in a church where there are all too few troubleshooters like Titus and clear preachers like Paul to bolster them this letter is calling us to the truth of the gospel not just to win converts not just for the knowledge of truth but for godliness in behavior so that there may be real hope of eternal life that those ancient promises will bear fruit and come to life in people's lives as the gospel does its work so let us pray our heavenly father what an astonishing thing to be entrusted with the gospel of

Jesus Christ so the people's lives may be one for him that they may be filled with the knowledge of truth that lives may be changed and transformed by that powerful word to be godly and full of hope and we thank you that eons ago you made promises concerning eternal life that are now revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ his death and resurrection and ascension to heaven for us we pray that you'll fill us with hope as we long for the total and final fulfillment of those promises when we stand in your heavenly presence and sing your praises there oh god our savior amen o o lost you o Thank you.