

Paul, Titus and the Letter

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[0 : 0 0] Well friends, I want to start with a story.

The story is about a fictional man, a boy, called Zeke. Now Zeke loved the first month of the year. The family would prepare carefully.

They would wait in eager anticipation. Day one, day two, day three, and finally the tenth day would arrive. And Zeke would go out with his dad.

And he and his dad would go out and look around the flock. And his dad would look carefully among the year-old sheep and goats. His eye would scan for the choicest of young, one which had no physical defect, one that was without blemish.

And together, they would take the young lamb or the goat and put it in a special pen. And there it would be. And it would be held for the remaining days.

[1 : 0 2] Now Zeke knew that what he and his father did was this day being replicated all across Israel. Every household did the same action. Every household searched for an appropriate animal.

And every family waited with their specially isolated creature. And then came the fourteenth day. The day in the middle of the first month.

His mother would be preparing carefully. He and his father would take the lamb. It would be slaughtered as directed. Blood would be collected in a little bowl.

And a bunch of hyssop branch would be taken and dipped into the blood. And Zeke's father would approach the door of the house. And he would paint blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts.

Then they would enter into the house. And there they would remain. Feasting on the flesh of cooked lamb. Eating deliciously prepared food.

[2 : 0 4] Eating unleavened bread. Listening to stories of what God had done for his people Israel. Celebrating the Passover. Just as every other family in Israel did.

Friends, this is how Israel marked the beginning of their year. Their year began by them remembering corporately. The great rescue of redemption that God had accomplished for them in Egypt.

You see, that event of redemption, that exodus, shaped their existence as God's people. That event marked the beginning of their year. It marked their identity.

Now friends, today we mark the beginning of 2012. And this last week I have listened to the radio. And I've watched on the internet.

And I've watched on the TV. And there have been those endless rehearsals of the past year that we are so used to. There have been collages of images, of music, of sound bites.

[3 : 0 6] The whole deal. And sometimes they've put them all together into one. I've watched with people stare with fear and wonder and anticipation at the possibilities of the year to come.

Some of us have resolved that this year will be the year that we, well you fill in the blanks. Lose weight. Stop some habit or addiction. Take up some new activity. Accomplish some new goal.

Do what you didn't do last year. Some of you may have done none of this. For some of you, you see, January the 1st is a day for business as usual.

That is a day no different from yesterday and no different from tomorrow. However, I wonder if I might make a suggestion this morning. Perhaps we might think more constructively about the year to come.

You see, in the next month we are going to be having a look at the book of Titus together in our morning services. We're going to be reading Habakkuk alongside it, but we're going to be looking in our sermons at Titus.

[4 : 03] And I wonder if we might use these few short verses from the beginning of Titus to help us think about the year to come. Now you may think they're unlikely verses, but by the end I hope you'll see that they're very helpful and good verses.

So turn in your Bibles with me to Titus chapter 1. And we're going to look at verses 1 to 4. And let's see what God has to teach us. And let's see what we might gain from these verses about how we might spend the year before our God.

And with that in mind, I'm going to pray. Father God, we thank you for your word. We thank you for these verses in particular.

Help us to understand them. And Father, please shape our existence by them. And please shape this year to come by them. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now let me begin by telling you a little bit about the address to which this letter is directed.

Look at verse 1. You can see it there. We're told that the author of this letter is Paul, the apostle. He's writing to a certain Titus. Verse 5 tells us that it's written to this Titus in Crete.

[5 : 13] Now Crete is the largest of the Greek islands. It's the fifth largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. And as far as we know, Paul only visited it once. But it's entirely possible that he may have gone there more than once.

Anyway, here at Crete, there are a bunch of Christians. And apparently Paul is still active in ministry. There's no hint that he's in prison at this time. And Paul writes to Titus about the Christians there.

And with that in mind, let's turn to the key players in these first few verses. By the way, there is an outline, hopefully, in your newsletter. If you don't have one, I'm sorry. But if you do have one, you might like to follow along.

The first key player in this little drama of four verses is Paul. Let's see what we can find out about him. Look at verse 1. He identifies himself. He is the servant of God.

Now, the term the servant of God is a term that has great Old Testament credentials. It is someone you wanted to be in the Old Testament.

[6 : 18] Moses, you see, is called the servant of God in the book of Joshua. Joshua is called the servant of God. King David is called the servant of God.

Prophets such as Jeremiah are called the servant of God. And the great servant of God himself in the book of Isaiah is that. You see, what I think Paul is doing here is that he's lining himself up with those Old Testament greats.

But you see, they weren't only great because they were servants of the Lord. No, it's the one they serve who is great. They are merely those who will do his bidding.

And so by saying you're a servant of the Lord, you're saying I am someone at God's bidding. But Paul adds a little element to this. And it's really hidden from us a little bit in our versions.

You see, the word servant you see there in verse 1 is actually a bit soft. Because in the original, it is a slave. And by using the term slave, Paul is emphasizing that he is the property of someone else.

[7 : 24] He is the property of God who is his master. He is completely in dependence upon his master. He is at his master's will. He is at his master's command.

What his master says is his to do. But have another look at verse 1. Paul doesn't just use an Old Testament title. He uses a New Testament title as well.

You see, he's not just the servant of God. No, he is the apostle or an apostle of Jesus Christ. In other words, he has been uniquely called by Jesus Christ.

He's been commissioned by the risen Lord Jesus Christ. He has the authority of Christ himself. Jesus is the one behind all that he does.

With that said, he launches off to explain what it is that God has commissioned him to do. Now, at this point, our translation is not as clear as it could be. The NRSV, you'll notice, has Paul as a slave, an apostle, and an apostle.

[8 : 24] And then it says, can you see it there? For the sake of the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth. I think the New International Version might be a little bit better at this point.

It says, and see if you can spot the difference. Paul is a slave and apostle to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth.

Can you see what's being said here? The commissioning, the purpose or goal of the commissioning of Jesus Christ is this. To further or bring about the furtherance of the faith of God's elect, number one.

And number two, to bring about a furthering of their knowledge of the truth that is in accord with godliness. Did you see the words that are there in this little sentence?

Look at them. Faith, knowledge, godliness. You see, this is what God wants of us. The furthering of our faith. The furthering of our knowledge.

[9 : 24] And the furthering of a knowledge that is in accord with godliness. Friends, this is not only the goal of Paul's ministry. It is the goal of my ministry as well.

It is the goal of our ministry to each other. You see, I teach you the Bible for a reason. Not because I just want you to know more about the Bible. I teach you the Bible so that your faith might grow.

I teach you the Bible so that your knowledge of God might grow. Not necessarily, although I hope this happens. I don't want you to simply be people who have a knowledge of the Bible.

No. I want you to be people who have a great knowledge of the Bible. But I want you to have a knowledge that is in accordance with godliness.

In other words, it is a knowledge that is matched by godly character. Godly thinking. Godly actions. Godly lifestyle.

[10 : 21] Godly relationships. Godly conduct. Friends, if you read Paul's letters, you will see this essential truth paraded time and time again before us. True faith comes from true knowledge.

True faith and knowledge not only produce godliness but are matched by godliness. True faith and knowledge can be identified by its results. Godly people.

Godly life that they live. Godly life. In other words, you can tell a Christian, a true Christian, by the godly life that they live. By the fact that their faith and their knowledge is matched by godliness.

Friends, I wonder if this is true for you. Can people tell that you are a Christian by the life that you lead? For that is what Paul is directing his ministry at.

Now that question posed, let's move on. Paul has presented the goal that he has as an apostle. Now he presents the basis for his apostleship. It's there in verse 2. Look at what Paul says. He speaks of the hope of eternal life.

[11 : 25] The hope of eternal life promised before the ages began. Then, in due time, this promise, this word, was revealed through the proclamation with which Paul had been entrusted.

So, God has entrusted a word or a promise to Paul. And Paul says this entrusting was by the command of God our Saviour. Friends, Paul is saying that underneath his apostleship lies a command of God.

And that command is about God's promise. And that promise has, at its core, the hope of eternal life. And in Paul's proclamation of the gospel, he is revealing that promise.

Did you notice the additional word that Paul has added here? Do you remember before we noticed the word faith? And we noticed the word knowledge? Do you see the third word that has been added here?

Hope. And godliness flows from each one of them. Now, just those three words, faith, knowledge, and hope. What's strange about them? There's one that's strikingly missing.

[12 : 34] It's been replaced by something else. Faith, hope, and love. But not here. Paul actually wants to emphasize something else. He wants to emphasize knowledge.

He still has love there. I think it comes under the umbrella of godliness. But these things flow from knowing things as well. So, friends, in these first few verses, we are presented with Paul, the first key player.

Paul, the slave of God. Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ. His apostleship is for our sake, so that we might know the truth and practice godliness, so that we might know the hope of eternal life promised in the gospel.

That's key player number one. Key player number two. Well, you can see him there. He's Titus. He's addressed in verse four. And let me tell you just a very little bit about Titus, because we need to know, because this whole letter is addressed to him.

He's a Gentile. We know this from Galatians chapter two. There we meet him in the company of Paul, and we're told that he was not compelled to be circumcised.

[13 : 36] He was Gentile, and he was not forced to become Jew, to become Christian. We know that he worked extensively with Paul, especially in fundraising. He was apparently very good at it.

He worked in collecting money for the saints in Jerusalem. Now, look at what Paul says to him in verse four. First, he calls him a loyal child. It's clearly an affectionate term.

However, let me tell you, it's not nearly as affectionate as Paul's description of Timothy. If you read one Timothy chapter or two Timothy chapter one, verse two, Paul calls Timothy his beloved child.

That's adding another step of affection, isn't it? And the letter Paul writes to Titus is a bit more businesslike and lacking in the warmth that Timothy's letter has.

However, Paul and Titus are clearly close. They are fellow believers, fellow workers in the gospel. Titus is one who can be wished grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus the Savior.

[14 : 36] Paul clearly trusts this Titus deeply. He's a sharer in his ministry. He's Paul's representative. In fact, I think he's Paul's troubleshooter in Crete, as Timothy is Paul's troubleshooter in Ephesus.

Now, let's turn to the most significant player. And we've all been, well, I've been holding off this most significant player. It is God himself. First, we had Paul the apostle.

Then we had Titus, his troubleshooter. But the center of these verses is God. It's clearly what ties these verses together. So with that in mind, let's find out what we can about God, this key player.

The first thing to say about God, and you might like to, if you've got notes there, write it down here, is that God is a God who instigates salvation. He instigates salvation.

Look at verses 2 and 3. We're told that God had eternal life lined up for his people. We're told that he planned it before the ages began. Then in due time, he had revealed it.

[15 : 43] God is a God who instigates salvation. He has an eternal redemptive plan. He's the saving God. As verse 3 says, he is God, our Savior.

God instigates salvation. But who else is this God that Paul proclaims? Well, the second thing Paul tells us is that he's an electing God. Look at verse 1.

Paul talks about God's elect. And Christians, he says, are that. God's elect. And election means exactly what it sounds like. You know, when we elect people, we choose them.

That is what election is about. It's about God's choosing of people. God chooses people. If you are Christian, you are God's chosen ones. God's elect.

Friends, this is a massive comfort. You see, if God chooses us, if God elects us, if we are his elect, then we are safe in his hands.

[16 : 42] We are his treasured possession. Listen to Paul celebrate this in Romans 8. He says, what can we say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? And he's just spoken about God's predestination of Christians.

He who did not withhold his own son but gave him up for all of us, will he not also give us everything with him? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Who is there to condemn? You see, if we are God's elect, God is for us. So Paul has told us two things about our God.

He instigates salvation. He is a God who elects. And the third characteristic is that our God is a God who promises. Friends, from the very first page of the Bible, we hear of God speaking.

And on the very last page, he is still speaking. He is the speaking God. And when he speaks, he invariably promises. He might promise judgment on sinners.

[17 : 44] He might promise justice will be done. He might promise, but he promises and promises and promises throughout Scripture. And this passage tells us of one great promise, one particular promise, the promise of eternal life.

Look at it in verse 2. The hope of eternal life. Friends, the hope of eternal life that we Christians have is not some vague wish. You know, something that we sort of long for and we don't quite know whether it's going to happen or not.

It's the promise of an eternal God. Of the eternal God. It is something that he promised long ages ago. Before the ages began.

Friend, this is the third characteristic of God that we see in this passage. He's a God who promises. We live in a world of lies and liars, don't we?

Our politicians are liars. People we meet on the internet are often liars. Even those who are closest to us have often been found to have lies on their lips.

[18 : 52] And this is because we live in a world dominated by the evil one. And such a world is a world of falsehood and a world of lies. And we know this because this world that we live in is so dominated by the evil one.

And that evil one is the one whom Jesus called the father of lies. So there is no surprise when his children lie. But friends, the God who promises, the eternal God who promises eternal life, is not the evil one and he is no liar.

As Paul says in verse 2, he is the God who never lies. He is the truth telling God. This is the fourth characteristic of God. He is the God who tells the truth.

The truth telling God. And that's very important to know because he's been a God who promises. Fourth, the last characteristic of God paraded before us by Paul here.

Paul's God, our God is the God who instigates salvation, who elects, who promises, who tells the truth. And he's the God who therefore fulfills his promise. Look at verse 3.

[20 : 07] Paul lays it out before us. In due time, God revealed his word. That is, he brought it to light. He disclosed it. His promise. And in so doing, and he did so through the preaching that he entrusted to Paul.

In the proclamation of the gospel concerning his son, God reveals his character in all its beauty and grandeur. He says who he says he is.

He is the truth telling, promising, fulfilling, electing and saving God. Friends, I know that this year. I know because I've talked to you and I've sometimes cried with you.

I know that many of you here have sometimes felt as though God has not lived up to his word for you.

I know that some of you here today have experienced in life what Bible people often experienced. That you have to wait for the promises of God.

[21 : 09] God proclaims that his word is not a lie. It is true. He is no liar.

His word is his promise. God keeps his promises. Sometimes we have to wait for them.

We know that from this passage. God's word though, God's promise will come about. God stakes his reputation on his word and his promise.

We may have to wait for the due time. But his word will come about. I want to close today by drawing together some implications of what we've learned from this passage.

The first implication is for Titus the pastor. Well, that means it's really for me. So I thought I'd tell you what I get from this passage about what God is telling me, Andrew the pastor.

[22 : 10] It is this. He's telling these things to Titus and to me. To urge us that this is the context in which ministry is conducted. As I go about my ministry, God is saying to me, I have an eternal plan, Andrew.

It involves calling elect people to the knowledge of the truth that accords with godliness. It is a plan filled with the hope of salvation. That salvation is backed up by my word and my character.

It's revealed in the gospel. Friends, when Titus and I encounter falsehood and false teachers, this is what we are to remember.

For as the letter goes on, that is exactly what Titus encounters. When Titus and I appoint leaders, that is what we are to remember. As Titus appoints leaders in this letter.

When the people of God deviate from the truth. These are the things that we are to remember. When we, all of us, but me particularly, instruct children, young men, young women, older men, older women.

[23 : 19] We are to have this at the back of our instruction. These truths about God. When we instruct people on how to live, as I do here in the pulpit. But we are to do so with this great God and his great gospel plan.

As the backdrop for our instruction. Friends, this is why I teach the scriptures. Because the scriptures are designed to accomplish these very things. They are able to make people wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

And they are also useful for these sorts of things. For teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. So that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. So these are God's words to Titus.

And to me, the pastor. But let's switch from Titus and me to you. Let's switch to all of us, perhaps, on the cusp of a new year.

Friends, I love the way that the Jews begin their new year in the book of Exodus. It's wonderful, isn't it? They don't start with some vague hopes. They don't start with New Year's resolutions.

[24 : 23] They start with concrete truths. They don't start with themselves and their own efforts to achieve something. They start with what God has done.

The concrete truth they had is that God is the God who saves and who rescues. And they remind themselves of that on the days the year begins.

They spend a whole month doing it. Or at least half a month. They celebrate it. They say, this is the God we worship. And I want to urge you today to do the same.

There's nothing wrong with New Year's resolutions. There's nothing wrong with looking ahead in hope. But friends, let me tell you, we don't know what this year will bring. For some of you, it will bring joy.

All sorts of joys are possible. The joy of a new relationship. The joy of a new child or grandchild or great-grandchild. The joy of a holiday in God's creation with a life's companion or a group of friends.

[25 : 27] The joy of a new life's creation with a new life. The joy of a new life. The enjoyment of soaking up the wonderful world that God has given us and enjoying it. For some, though, this new year is going to bring pain and hardship.

A lost job. A broken relationship. The death of a life partner or a life friend. Sickness. Sickness. And for some, this year may even bring death itself.

I cannot know or say what this year will bring for you. And nor can you. But I know what God is like. And I know because of what he has done in Jesus.

Because of Jesus, I know that God is the God who instigates salvation. I know that he is a God who elects and therefore keeps.

I know he is a God who promises and does not lie. I know that he is a God who fulfills his promises. So as you face the new year, as I face this new year, I want us to look forward by looking backward.

[26 : 41] Do you understand what I am saying? To look forward by looking backward. I want you to look back to what God has shown himself to be.

Particularly in the gospel, the great news about Jesus Christ. And look back and establish that firmly in your brain. And in your heart.

And then, walk backward into the future. With your eyes fixed there. Knowing that that is what will shape your life ahead. Be confident that the God you meet in Jesus is the God who oversees this coming year.

Keep your faith in him strong. You see, he is faithful. And strong. And true. And rejoice together in the faith that we share.

And the grace and peace of God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour be with you. Amen. Amen. Well, in response to God's word and God's wonderful salvation.

[27 : 55] We...