

In Hope of Eternal Life

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 July 2015

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 01] Turn with me now please to Paul's letter to Titus, short letter of Paul to Titus. I'm going to look at the beginning of this letter, verses 1 to 3.

We already dealt with verse 1. You may recall a couple of weeks ago we looked at verse 1, and we had intended then looking at verses 1 to 3, but only got as far as verse 1.

So we're now picking it up to look at the second part of this short passage, the introduction to this letter to Titus. 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 Saviour.

We compared it something like opening a box of chocolates and looking at the different kinds of chocolates that you have in the box and then picking them out and tasting them one by one. Well, this is really, in a sense, like a box of spiritual chocolates, this letter to Titus, and the introduction there is really the card, if you like, that shows what these different chocolates are, what they contain.

In other words, the different truths, the different points that are made within this introduction are expanded on in the rest of the letter, but you get a taste for them here in the beginning, in the introduction.

[1 : 34] And we looked last time at Paul's person at ministry, the man and his ministry, in the first part of the passage. Remember, we saw something of the meaning there of what he, where he describes himself as a servant of God, the bond that he has with God and how that is also applicable to our life as Christians.

An apostle, somebody sent by God, somebody who has a specific message to tell. Again, that's important to God's people as well in their particular ministry. And we followed on from that to see how Paul says that this is really for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, the various different points in that as they relate together. It's the truth of God that Paul is committed to and has been given to present in the gospel. But it's also the knowledge and the faith of God's people, described there as God's elect, God's chosen people, their faith and their knowledge, which accords with godliness.

In other words, we notice there how faith and knowledge of God, how our personal relationship with God, as that involves our believing, our trusting, as well as our knowledge, that that is always connected to godliness.

It's never to be detached from the kind of lifestyle that God requires of his people. And that takes us now into, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.

[3 : 13] So in other words, he's really bringing us from looking at the faith and the knowledge that God's people have to the end or the terminus, or the thing which that faith and that knowledge really brings them into and keeps them in, in the sense in which once we come to know eternal life in Jesus Christ, that's something that no power on earth can remove from us.

It's something in which God has deposited us, into which he has deposited us and which we have as our security. So that's one of the great points we're going to look at, as well as this hope that's attached to it there.

So it's eternal life as revealed and promised. That's the main feature of the final part of this passage, and we're going to look at a number of things in it.

In hope of eternal life, which God promised before the ages began. One of the great themes or important points in the New Testament, it's in the Old as well, of course, but it's there in abundance

in Paul's letters, is the Christian's hope.

And we come across it so very often, and so very often point out the fact that it's different to the hope that you find in the ordinary sense, which is not based on something that you know is absolutely sure to come true.

[4 : 43] The hope of God's people is based on something that you know is going to be true, going to become true and in your possession. Fine, that's the eternal life that he mentions here.

Now, because that's where God has situated us, by faith and knowledge of the truth, we have this hope of eternal life. We have something in this hope, that faith and knowledge, if you like, live out through this hope.

You cannot detach faith and knowledge from this hope. In fact, you could say that in the teaching of the Bible, faith, trusting in God, believing the things of God, and knowledge, your knowing of God, your relationship with him, neither of these have any meaning at all, really, in the Bible's teaching, if you detach them from hope.

Because the three things, faith and knowledge and hope, are attached inseparably to eternal life. And that's why hope is something in the Bible that really is connected to those things that are unseen.

We've seen that already in our reading this morning, in Romans chapter 8, where Paul is comparing the things of this present life, the sufferings especially of this present life, with the glory that is to be revealed.

[6 : 15] Something that lies yet in the future. Now, of course, faith also relates to hope. You believe things that God has specified as truth. You accept them as truth.

Faith, trust in God, believing these things, and living by trusting in God. You accept these things as the truth, even though you cannot see them.

Even though they're still beyond you in terms of physical sight, those things of eternal life in heaven. They're just as real to you as a believer as the things of this world are.

Why is that? Because of your faith, or through your faith, you believe in the truth of them. But that truth, that believing in the truth, it doesn't make any sense, as we say, without hope.

As you believe in those things, so your hope is exercised towards them. Romans 8 and verses 24 to 25, where we read together, really sets the tone for us in terms of what we are, the point that we're making in terms of those things which are unseen.

[7 : 30] He says, regarding the creation itself, that the whole creation really is waiting for this moment of Christ's return, and of the redemption of our bodies, the resurrection.

But He says, in this hope, we were saved. Isn't that an interesting thing? We were saved in this hope. And in the likes of Ephesians 2, He describes us, before we came to know Christ, before we came to be saved, before we came to that relationship of a living knowledge of Christ, we were without God, without hope in this world.

We didn't have such a thing as hope. But the moment you're saved, the moment you come into this knowledge, the moment you exercise this trust, this faith in God, you also have hope.

In this hope, we were saved. And what is this hope? Well, it's not for those things which are seen.

For He says, who hopes for what He sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Why is this really such an important point? Well, for two reasons, I think. First of all, if you cast your mind back to Moses, leading the people out of Egypt, and then being with them, or being their leader as they went through these years in the wilderness, and it wasn't just soon after they came out of Egypt, this repeated itself at different times on their journey.

[9 : 03] What was it? The fact that they were hankering back to the things of Egypt. That was a big problem for Moses that these people that he had led out of Egypt and to whom God had given the promises of being inheritors of Canaan, the promised land.

Despite the fact that they had God's work to look back upon in delivering them from Egypt, their redemption, if you like, accomplished by God, taking them out of the slavery of Egypt, and despite the fact that he had added to that these great promises of what lay ahead of them in the land of Canaan, they so often said, or that we were back in Egypt, why has God taken us into this terrible wilderness to die here?

We'd rather be back in Egypt with all the food that we had there, even despite the fact that they knew there were slaves there. You see, that's why the Bible keeps pushing this at us, the hope that

we must exercise, because we live in conditions where within ourselves there is such a tendency to go back, a tendency instead of pushing forward and being positive in a hope beyond the present life, and beyond our present troubles, and beyond our present difficulties, there's the tendency to begin to just lose heart, and to draw back, and to be discouraged, and to really begin like the psalmist in Psalm 73, to be envious at the way the world lives, without worries about eternity, without the great questions of life and death and eternity troubling them.

And that's why in this world we face a society that you might call a this world society. We live amongst people generally who don't look beyond this world, who don't want to think beyond this world, who refuse to think that there's anything meaningful beyond this present life, which is why you get such a great drive towards things like euthanasia, towards pushing the Bible out of public life.

All of that stems from unbelief. It stems from the kind of outlook that sees nothing meaningful beyond what you find in the space of your lifetime in this world, or beyond this time and space that people live in in succeeding generations.

[12:02] When your life comes to an end in this world, it's at an end. There's nothing beyond that. That's the philosophy. That's the this world society we live amongst. And some of that is seeping into our own minds sometimes imperceptibly.

Sometimes the philosophy of the world actually makes its way. Just like a ship on the ocean sometimes maybe not as much nowadays but certainly in days gone by when you had wooden boats and you still have wooden boats I'm sure as well but sometimes the sea just seeps in in little cracks that appear and imperceptibly hardly noticeably at first until you actually suddenly are taken up short and see there's a lot of water in here.

It can be like that with your life as well and my life with the Christian life. It doesn't matter how advanced you are. It doesn't matter whether you're a minister. It doesn't matter whether you're an elder or whatever position we have in the church.

It doesn't matter how experienced we may be in the Christian life. How far on we've traveled already as pilgrims in the world. We are all liable to failure. We are all liable to letting the thinking of the world come to seep into our minds.

And this is what we've come back to. What is my hope set upon? What am I in this world for? What am I as a Christian life? What has God given me?

[13:30] Why has he changed my life? And that's why Paul is saying here it's for the sake of the faith and the knowledge of God's people that he's been given this ministry, this ministry of a servant and an apostle of Christ in hope of eternal life.

Whenever you feel tempted to be discouraged, look upwards, look beyond, look beyond the ramparts of this world, look over the walls of time, look towards eternity, look towards the things that are deposited for you in Jesus Christ, look towards what the Bible describes and the way it describes eternal life and something of what that means.

I know we can't understand so much of that while we're in this world, but we can understand enough of it to actually wound discouragement and to overcome discouragement and to realign our thinking with the very mind and thoughts of God himself.

He hasn't brought us out of darkness so that we would live in the nebulous world of doubt and uncertainty. He's brought us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

In other words, into things which are certain, things which are sure, things which God has verified for us, whatever unbelief and atheism says, God has verified for us for them and you've only got to look to one place to actually know that that's true and that's in the death and resurrection of Jesus in the hope of eternal life.

[15:20] which he says, God promised before the ages began. Now that's important because hope, just as much as faith, hope particularly lives by the promise of God.

The truth of God contains the promises of God. And hope as you look forward beyond this life, beyond your problems, beyond the troubles, beyond time, beyond the scope of this world, hope lives upon, breathes the air of God's promises.

That's why faith, while it looks forward as well and believes what the promises contain, faith also looks back, you see, in faith, in looking to further evidence to feed your encouragement, faith looks back to the way God has already fulfilled some promises.

They're set out for us in the Bible, where God promised to Abraham that he would have a son. It took over 20 years for that promise to be fulfilled, but it happened, and it happened, as we'll see

later, exactly as God specified.

Every time God has promised something would happen, and it's the same with the coming of the Savior, the coming of Christ, and what he would experience, and what he would do in this world, it's happened.

[16 : 50] It's happened as God promised it, and that's where you find your hope to be firmly encouraged, if you like, and anchored in what's already happened, because faith says, I believe that God is true to his promises because it's already fulfilled, many of them in ages gone by, and because he's done that, I know that he will fulfill all that remains to be done of his promises too.

Yet there's something else. It's not just that you look back to what God has already done, and take encouragement from that, and therefore conclude that God will certainly do what he has promised, even though that's still in the future.

Your faith and your hope, they actually in many ways are set upon your knowledge of God.

And what this text is telling us is that it's the character of God himself that really provides the confidence for us. That's why it says here, God who never lies promised this before the ages began.

In other words, it's saying God promised eternal life to his people. This itself is a wonderful point. I'm not going to expand on it, otherwise we'd need a third study, but this is a great point in itself, that this eternal life which God's people will inherit in heaven when they are all together in heaven at last, God promised that before the creation existed.

[18 : 30] It was within the plan of God. It was the main thing in God's purpose for them. Eternal life, life in all its fullness.

Before the world ever began, before human beings were created, when nothing existed but God, this was real in the mind of God.

Isn't that amazing? What are we? How significant are we? many people would answer that, I'm nothing, I'm just insignificant.

Am I that I should think I'm in any way significant? Well, you're not in human terms. You're not in terms of being a sinner. Neither am I. But boy, are you significant.

When it's true about you as a Christian today that your eternal life and your possession of it and your enjoyment of it and the means towards your securing of it for yourself were all in the plan of God before you existed.

[19 : 48] That means that you are significant to him. That means that whatever people think of you, all you've got to do is go back and say, well, I know what God thinks of me.

I know that God thought of me before I ever existed, before the world existed because in his great plan of salvation, he had me connected with eternal life.

And that is from the God who never lies. Why are we sure that God's promises will indeed be fulfilled?

Well, because it's impossible for God to be untruthful. Whatever God says is founded on himself as ultimate and absolute truth.

Our word is always relative. It can prove not to be true. God is never like that. God's word is never relative. God's promise is never relative.

[20 : 54] God's word is not conditioned by other powers or agencies outside of himself. God's word is as sure as it can be because God is truth.

And he can't be anything other than truth. He never lies. Now it's interesting that Paul, in writing this letter to Titus, reminded Titus of the purpose why Paul had left him in Crete.

And that that was to establish various things for the church in Crete. but he also reminded him of the kind of people he was dealing with. And he describes the people of Crete in verse 12 here where he says that there are many who are insubordinate, they're empty talkers, they're deceivers, they must be silent since they're upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons, this testimony is true.

Well, Paul didn't know about political correctness, and even if he did, he didn't care. He wouldn't go about saying nowadays that the people of Point are just lazy gluttons, they're just liars, they've got this kind of tendency, I'm not saying it's true anyway, of course it's not, but even what it was, you wouldn't put it in such dark terms in a letter as Paul here to Titus, but this is Paul actually dealing

with the truth, and the truth means the truth about people, so the truth about people, these cretins, they are by their very nature, Paul is saying, liars, they're not dependable, you can't depend on them, they're changeable, they'll just be one thing one day, and one thing the other day, what a great contrast in this introduction, when he's talking about God, and the promises of God, and really you could put those two things together and say, well, the promises that you find in human terms, are they dependable?

[23 : 01] Well, not even for the best of human beings, from the best of human beings, they're not absolutely dependable, you cannot depend absolutely, even on somebody that you know is true and reliable, there may come a point when they will wobble somewhat, not with God, you take the promises of God, you can hold on to them, they are absolutely guaranteed, why?

Because they are based in God himself, who is truth, the God who never lies, that's why you've got the likes of Hebrews, the next letter in the Bible, the next book in the Bible, chapter 10 there, we can round off this point by looking at what it says there, chapter 10 verse 23, there's a number of things there he says in the light of what Christ is to his people, but one of the things, one of the exhortations there is since this is true, that we have such a high priest, let us hold fast the confession of our hope, he's not just saying the confession of our faith, which is what we normally think of, the confession of our hope, this hope of eternal life, let's hold it fast, how can we hold it fast?

Well because he says, he who promised is faithful, faithful, and to be faithful you need to be truthful, and that's where you find God who never lies, so precious to us in his truth, so there's the hope of eternal life, it was promised before the world began, and it was promised by the God who never lies, but then he says, it was manifested, it was brought to light, by his word, or in his word, through the preaching, he's becoming more specific about how this truth of God, and how the promises of that truth, the very things on which your hope rests, how that has actually been brought to light, how we come to know it, well he says it's through his word, in fact there are four things, they're on your notes there, the four things related to the manifesting of this promise of eternal life, or the manifesting of eternal life, if you like, as a promise from

God, first thing you have to say about it is that what God reveals of his truth, of his promise, always fits with what he has promised, the truth as it comes to light, as it comes to fulfillment, the promise as it's fulfilled, is always exactly as God has promised, take for example Abraham again, when God promised a son to Abraham, he told him that it would be through Sarah, she was past, ordinarily past the age of childbearing, and yet that's exactly how Isaac came into the world, Sarah became pregnant, she bore the child, she gave birth to Isaac, just as God had said, the promise said one thing, the fulfillment said exactly the same thing, and that's how it is with all of God's promises, whatever God promises, as you look into the contents of the promise, when it comes to fulfillment, it will be exactly as he promised, and when you think of eternal life, it will be exactly as God promised, there is one thing however about it that you have to say, it will be far, far better in its fullness, than you can ever appreciate now, we're not able to appreciate what it will be like in heaven, we're able to know something about it, we're able to know something of what God has promised about it, we're able to know indeed that that's why God has saved us, but the experience of it in its fullness, finally, will be far, far better than you ever hoped for, or could experience now, in this life, secondly, it's at the proper time, he promised before the ages began, but at the proper time, this was manifested, this came to light through his word, that's how God is, isn't it, sometimes we think that God's timetable should fit with our timetable, sometimes we think that

[27 : 54] God's diary really should be exactly in the same terms as our own, that when we're praying for certain things, that we really should expect to have our prayers answered just as we specify, or that things should happen in our lives or in the lives of other people or in the world, just as we think it might be best for them to happen.

God has his own diary, he doesn't make adjustments to it, doesn't need to, everything that happens in the world, in the process of time, in your life, in the process of time, it's already been diaried by God before the world began.

That doesn't make prayer anything other than meaningful, doesn't make prayer useless, it doesn't mean we don't pray and seek for God's answer to prayer. Everything as far as God is concerned is in these words, at the proper time.

when it fits his plan, when it is the working out of his diary, when it's an appointment that he has put in his book and his diary from all eternity, that's when it will happen in time, because that's the right

time, as far as God is concerned.

Same happened when Jesus was born, when the Son of God came into this world, Galatians and chapter 4, these great verses, Galatians 4 and verse 4, when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son.

[29 : 30] There's you see a picture of God in eternity as it were, looking at his diary and in human terms and in the terms of time as we know it in this world, God is saying to his Son, it's time.

it's the point in our purpose that we planned from all eternity but now in the time scale of these human beings, it's time for you to go forth, to be born of a woman, to be made under the law. doesn't that add to your confidence in God? That he doesn't make mistakes? That everything he has penciled into his diary is penciled in for our good, for our benefit, in the time scale that God himself has purposed.

if it was a God who was fickle, a God who was changeable, a God who would actually change the entries in his diary to suit what you thought was best or what I thought was best, how dependable would that God be?

That's the kind of thing that paganism used to think about in the days of Elijah and the Old Testament when the Baals were prayed to and when they imported all of that into their own practices as the people of Israel.

[30 : 57] That's why the prophets were so annoyed and so given to bring these severe messages from God. What were they doing really? They were bringing gods that the people of Canaan and these pagan nations regarded as being changeable.

They could actually be influenced by what you did on earth. They could change their plans just as you thought they should change their plan to suit your purposes. What good is that? what sort of foundation would that be to build your life on? To build your eternity on? That's not how God is. He never lies.

He never changes his mind. He's never influenced by human thought, by human wisdom. God. It's at the proper time.

And how many times we reflect on life and we think back to events that at the time they happened we wondered well why this and why now?

[32 : 08] And why at this particular point in my life? And yet with experience of God and walking with God and reflecting through God's truth on what has happened in our lives as we read the book of Providence we come more and more to realize well Lord I have to hold up my hands and say yes everything you do is at the proper time because only you know all about me and about my needs and about my future as well as my past at the proper time precious words and thirdly this truth is manifested by or in his word by his word and by that Paul means particularly the word written although he comes on to think of it also through preaching but it's the word as we know it as the scriptures that's where God's plan where God's purpose of eternal life for his people where God's promise of eternal life and the things of eternal life where they've come to be revealed to us manifested at the proper time by his word or in his word through its preaching let me just say this before we finish the Bible gives us an exact picture of the mind of God it gives us an exact picture of what God says concerning eternal life it gives us an exact picture of how we get into eternal life or how we may be left out of eternal life it's all there that's why the forces of unbelief are so keen that you don't actually use your

Bible properly or fully as you should and why the Bible should in their way of thinking be just taken out of public life altogether because it's not appropriate for humanism and atheism to see this book used in a public sense for public decisions for decisions of government for policies of councils for anything to do with education none of that should in any way be influenced by the Bible that's the philosophy of humanism secular humanism and here is God himself saying eternal life the very purpose for which I save my people I have revealed that where is it revealed it's revealed in the Bible I have given them my word because in my word I have opened up to them I have manifested this great promise we cannot possibly adequately describe how important the Bible should be to our lives it is absolutely foundational absolutely crucial we teach that to our children we hopefully show that in our example to our children it's so important that you and I read our

Bibles and not just depend on the element of it being preached to us when we come to hear it preached good though that is and Paul is emphasizing that element of preaching as well the good news this good news of eternal life in Jesus Christ it is a preached message and it's important that it's preached and it's important that you hear it being preached but then you don't leave it at that you

read your Bible please go on reading your Bible please improve I'm saying this to myself please improve on your reading of the Bible please use every moment you've got for the reading of the Bible to read it to read it carefully prayerfully meaningfully to yourself it is the truth of God it is God's manifestation of his promise of eternal life how it's come about and how you come to possess it or how you may come to be left out of it it's all there and maybe indeed as a congregation it would be a good scheme

I was thinking just in preparing the sermon how good it would be for having a scheme that as a congregation we'd be reading through the Bible so that every day we're reading the same passage giving our mind to the same passage not for any purpose just to read it and know that together we're reading the Bible in a scheme that covers the same passages maybe we'll get up to doing that after the holidays God willing it would be a good thing for us to do to engage in that sort of scheme and realize it's a wonderful thing I think to realize that a whole congregation is reading the Bible together it doesn't matter whether it's at the same time of day but that we're doing it in a way that follows that scheme not legalistically not just thinking well I've done that therefore I've done my duty but doing it because it's meaningful and precious to have the Bible as a book to read as the book to read and therefore discover more of this great purpose and plan of God and the promise of eternal life for as Paul says in the second chapter the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled upright and godly lives in the present age waiting for our blessed hope by which he means the fulfilling of our hope the appearing of the glory of our great

God and Savior Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works amen may God bless this word let's pray lord we thank you for your promise and for your faithfulness upon which your promise is founded we thank you for the way in which you demonstrate for us how reliable you are in your word and how we have our faith and our hope and our knowledge so firmly attached to your truth we pray that you would bless to us today our thoughts upon this passage of your word and especially help us lord we pray to feed that hope that you have given to your people so that by your promises we may live daily and look forward to their fulfillment here as we pray for

[39 : 17] Jesus sake amen