

# The Nourishment of Gospel Ministry

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Father, thank you for your word, and thank you for how you speak to us. By the preaching of your word, we ask that your Holy Spirit will minister to each of our hearts, that we can receive your word as truth.

And I pray, Lord, that by your grace, you allow the words of my mouth, as I seek to minister your word to my dear friends, that these words will be pleasing in your sight, before the face of God and the host of angels, that Christ will be exalted, and that each one here will hear through the work of your Spirit, ministering to them exactly what you need them to hear, Lord, that their souls may be nourished by your word.

We ask this in the name of our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of the Father. Amen. Amen. Today's sermon is entitled, The Nourishment of Gospel Ministry.

The Nourishment of Gospel Ministry. Thinking of nourishment, I want to share with you a true story, and I want to warn you that this is heavy, but it's true.

We have to confront the harsh realities of life, and a church is a place where we have to be able to do that. So there was the little boy, standing in his smelly diaper, dirty clothes, nothing nearby him except a box of dry cereal.

[ 1 : 3 3 ]     And he had been caged in his pack-and-play for two years. We learned about this boy from some friends of ours who took him on as a foster child, a picture of some of the worst, most heartbreaking neglect.

Because of that neglect, for two years, this boy, toddler, not even a baby anymore, he can't walk, he is not able to speak correctly, and he has significant delays that are going to show up in his education as well.

And I know this is disturbing, and we need to know that God sees it all. Matthew 18.10, Jesus said, See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven, their angels always see the face of my Father, who is in heaven.

There's a special class of angels set apart for children, because God cares about them. So we know that newborns, babies, toddlers, they need food, they need a family, they need to be able to learn to walk, and take those steps, and move their legs, and arms, and exercise their body.

They also need loving instruction, and guidance. They need someone to help them, and show them. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3, you must be born again.

[ 3 : 0 0 ]     So if you've heard the gospel, and believed, you need to know, you are not abandoned by Christ. Christ meets all of your needs, and he does this through the true church, a congregation, a group of people that come together, and seek to follow the Bible, for gospel ministry.

And that's what we have in the letter of Titus. Today's text is Titus chapter 1, verses 1 through 5. Let's read God's word. Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Christ Jesus, 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, which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior, to Titus, my true child, in a common faith.

Grace and peace from God the Father, in Christ Jesus our Savior, this is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town, as I have directed you.

This is the word of God. Thanks be to our Lord. Well, in this wonderful introduction to the letter of Titus, he talks about the reason, he's writing for the sake of their faith, and because he knows God cares about their knowledge of the truth, and he wants to bolster up, and establish, and anchor in their hope, of eternal life.

So their faith, their knowledge, the truth, and their hope, in being united to Christ. He tells them, put the churches there, in order.

[ 4 : 58 ] So, we want to look today, really, at the nourishment of gospel ministry. The nourishment of gospel ministry. We see here, that even though Titus is on this distant island, Paul is far away.

We're confirming, right now, through the word of God, that Christ does not abandon his own. Christ adopts you into his family, and his home stands upon a solid, sound foundation.

gospel ministry is designed by God to take place within the house of God, the church. Gospel ministry is designed to protect your faith, to grow your knowledge, and to anchor you in hope.

We're going to unpack that in four parts. So first is the background to this letter. Second is the motivation for gospel ministry, verse one. Third, vessels that God has appointed for gospel ministry.

Vessels of gospel ministry, verses two and three. And finally, the structure or the order of gospel ministry, verses four and five. So beginning with background.

[ 6 : 11 ] For the background, let's look at those identified here. It's Paul, the author, Titus, the recipient, and Crete, which is his location. So first of Paul.

We know that Paul sailed along the coast of Crete after his first arrest. We read of this in the book of Acts. So Paul was arrested in Rome two times.

He was beheaded by sword at the end of the second arrest. But in between his first and second arrest, he had a period of time and he got right back on the mission field to plant more churches, proclaim the gospel.

We know that he traveled with a group of companions. Initially, it was with Barnabas and others, John Mark and others. But toward the end, his two trusted ambassadors or delegates were Timothy, who is probably even closer.

He receives more references. And right there with Timothy is Titus. So let's talk about Titus, the recipient of this letter. We know that Titus was a Greek.

[ 7 : 10 ] So he was a Gentile, not a Jewish man. But he believed the gospel. He got saved. He was discipled by Paul and raised up by God to be a missionary and really to be an apostolic delegate to be sent with the authority of Paul himself to look out over these churches that God had planted.

So Greek, a missionary, and he was also dearly beloved by Paul. If you read the references to Titus in the New Testament, he's mentioned over and over in the book of 2 Corinthians especially.

I want to start first with the reference in Galatians chapter 2. I won't read all of these, but this is so insightful to give us the context and to understand the relationship and the high level of trust, the high regard between Paul and Titus.

Galatians 2 says, Then after 14 years, Paul writing, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me and set before them the gospel that I proclaimed among the Gentiles, the good news about Christ to the world, to all the nations, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

And even Titus who was with me was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. And he's using Titus as an example of a well-respected and trusted leader in the early church to this church in Galatia so they can know, look, Titus traveling with me, understanding the biblical doctrine, he was not circumcised to be an example, to show you that this is not part of the new covenant.

[ 8 : 44 ] This is not something you should be imposing on the church in Galatia. And this will be an important theme throughout the book of Titus. Here's a second reference in 2 Corinthians 2. Paul said, When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there.

So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. So we know that Titus had covered a good amount of ground. Paul did meet up with Titus in Macedonia, which is Spain today, clear on the other side of the Mediterranean, the Iberian Peninsula.

But we're going back now to understand this moment in time between Paul's first and second missionary trips or first and second arrests when he is going along the coast of Crete.

And we don't know for sure if Paul had spent a significant amount of time in Crete before this period between the two arrests. Most likely he did not. We do know from Acts 2 that of all those who heard the gospel, there's a list of different nations and parts of the world.

Cretans are included. So they did hear the gospel proclaim in Acts chapter 2 by Peter in their own language. And they believed. So there was a Christian presence on the island of Crete.

[ 10 : 03 ] Now about Crete, it's in the Aegean Sea. So picture a string of Greek islands where people today would maybe go on a resort, a cruise resort, and hop from one Greek island to the other.

And it actually had that reputation for thousands of years. Philo, for example, listed Crete as one of the top three most highly esteemed islands of ancient Greece.

Homer referred to Crete as the city of, I'm sorry, the island of 100 cities, the 100 polis, 100 cities on this little island scattered across.

The island is shaped, it's a stretched out Long Island, 160 miles by 20 miles. So if you can picture that, there's this Aegean Sea, blue water, sandy beaches, rocky cliffs, and these cities, probably at least 46 cities at the time that Titus was there, all along this narrow coast.

There was not a Roman system of roads, so travel and communication between one Cretan city and another would have been very challenging, so they would have had to get on a boat and go up the coast until the next village.

[ 11 : 17 ] So here are all these more or less isolated villages on an island that has an ancient history, layers of culture. There's evidence of a Jewish presence there, of them forging their own coins and having their own currency, so a very strong sense of independence, their own government because they're so isolated.

And they had the reputation of being greedy, being entitled, immoral, and we do know that other religious leaders had been following along and causing confusion.

So as the gospel of Christ spreads to the different parts of the world, including this island of Crete, Satan is hunting it down right on the heels of those missionaries, trying to sow seeds of weeds that will choke out the gospel.

And two of the biggest problems in Crete, we know from later in the letter, are worldliness and legalism. So the doctrine that Paul is most interested in explaining is the correct view of the law and the gospel.

And this is what he'll show us throughout the letter. So let's begin with verse one now. What is the motivation for gospel ministry? And yes, Paul's reminding Titus of this, but he's also putting this letter in Titus' hand so Titus can show the churches, here's the authority, the grounds upon which I stand.

[ 12 : 38 ] And for us today, if the Lord has saved you and he's called you, he wants to meet your needs. He wants to nourish you through gospel ministry. And if you are part of gospel ministry, the motivation for why you are serving the Lord, why you are serving in the church, this is so important.

It's just as important today as it was in the time of Titus getting this letter from the hand of Paul. Paul writes in verse one, I'm 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.

So Paul identifies himself, I'm not bringing you a message, I'm a servant, a doulos, a slave of God himself, but I do speak with apostolic authority.

Jesus himself has given me this charge to remind you of the gospel and the reason is this, here's my motivation. My motivation in gospel ministry and Titus' motivation in working with the churches is for the sake of the faith of God's elect.

That is the motivation of all gospel ministry. God has a people and God desires that that people grow in their knowledge of the truth. You know why? Because it will lead to the type of life that prepares them for eternity with their Savior.

[ 14 : 07 ] And he's writing and we're ministering for the sake of your faith. Satan will attack and God does care that your faith be preserved and he will provide for that and he provides through the ministry of the church.

We see here how godliness accords with truth. Do you see that at the end of verse 1? Godliness accords or lines up with and fits with the truth.

He's not too interested in getting into the requirements of what it looks like to be a Christian. No, that comes later. He says, first you get the truth right because when the truth is right and you grasp the gospel and you behold Jesus and you love Jesus from the truth, your life will line itself up.

It will be slow but obedience with God to your God, your Savior, it will line up with the faith and the true gospel. So here's a word of encouragement to us in our motivation for ministry.

Wrestle with God for your faith and wrestle with God for the faith of your loved ones. You feel that pull in your gut? You feel that distance?

[ 15 : 22 ] You feel a concern for your loved ones? Get on your knees and wrestle with God for those souls, for your own soul because God cares about your faith. That's why He's given us His word, this letter, the whole of Scripture.

It's for the sake of the faith of God's elect. And then you can turn around and see, look, the doctrine and the life of the church, they really belong to God.

We don't get to make rules. We also don't get to just dismiss parts of God's word. We need to submit ourselves to all of God's word. He's our king. He rules over the church. So then you wrestle with your loved ones, maybe your children, maybe your own soul.

As you grow in sanctification, you wrestle to see God's holiness and to order our lives around Him. If He is at the center, everything else needs to fall into place with Christ at the throne.

Now, let's look at the opposite of that here. if you neglect the truth, it's like giving your soul junk food. You are going to be stunted in your growth.

[ 16 : 29 ] You are going to be anemic spiritually. You're going to experience a life of frustration. You will be frustrated either by your own sin or by your own merit, trying to be good enough, trying to earn enough, and you'll be in this torturous cycle because you're neglecting the truth.

You're going after behavior, trying to modify your behavior. And the truth, the motivation for gospel ministry, your faith, it grows with the knowledge of God through His Word and the godliness the life follows.

See, our motivation as a church, as believers who have come together to proclaim Christ and to grow as disciples, it's always forward-looking, but it's applied today.

Here's what I mean by that. we don't live only for this age, right? We are not living for the age of the world. We also are not living to try to conform to a previous age.

That's what was happening in Crete. Some were living it up for the pleasures of this life and this world and this age. But others were trying to conform the church to a previous age by trying to make them be circumcised.

[ 17 : 42 ] We are now called to live by faith in an age to come because Christ is returning and when He comes, He will introduce the final, eternal kingdom of God fully on earth as it is in heaven.

So our call now is to live during this overlap of those ages when Christ has inaugurated His kingdom but we're awaiting for it to be consummated. We live in this age as if our souls already belong in the age to come because if you're in Christ that's exactly the reality that you're in.

And that's our first point. Our motivation for gospel ministry is the sake of the faith of God's elect. We grow in the knowledge of truth so that our lives will conform.

Remember, Christ does not abandon His own. He gives you and He gives me and He gives the church a biblical gospel ministry so that you and I will grow in the faith and we'll grow in our knowledge of God and as a result we'll be established in our hope of salvation.

Alright, our third point. We've seen the background. We've seen our motivation. In verses 2 and 3 we're going to see what are the vessels of gospel ministry. The vessels. Verse 2.

[ 19 : 03 ] In the hope of eternal life which God who never lies promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in His word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior.

Did you catch the vehicle, the vessel, the instrument that God uses in gospel ministry? How does He communicate the hope of eternal life? Well, it's through the preaching of His word.

And that authority of the preaching it comes from God Himself. See, I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior. Jesus Christ commanded the apostles to write down these words of eternal life.

Write down these promises of God and He raises up ministers of that word. He raises up pastors like Titus and He raises up pastors like Timothy and Barnabas and countless others throughout every single generation.

And what is exactly the gospel that these shepherds are proclaiming, these ministers of God's word? See, He says, it's a hope which God who never lies promised before the ages began.

[ 20 : 20 ] Before the ages began, this was promised. Well, turn with me to 2 Timothy chapter 1. 2 Timothy 1. I want to read verses 8 and 9 because we get another wonderful insight from a letter that was in the same cluster.

These are called the pastoral letters, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. Similar time period, similar theme and message. And listen to how in 2 Timothy chapter 1 verses 8 and 9, Paul explains this reference here to a promise that God made before the ages began.

Paul wrote, Do not be ashamed about the testimony of our Lord, but share in the sufferings for the sake of the gospel by the power of God, here it is, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, now listen to this, not because of our works, but, here's the reference, because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

This is what we refer to as the covenant of redemption. This is the agreement between Father and Son that God would save His people since before time it's been promised.

It's been manifested in His Word. God's Word is for you, for your town, for every village on the island of Crete. It's for every nation and island today. We are to proclaim what's been entrusted, this gospel promise recorded in the Bible, preached from every generation, disciples in every Christian home, raising up new generations of believers.

[ 22 : 09 ] It's entrusted from one to the other by the work of the Spirit. You are God's chosen vessels. If you're a true believer, He wants to minister the truth of the gospel through you, and He wants your witness to the gospel, how He has changed your life, He wants that to be the ministry of the church.

As people come into contact with the church, they see now, look, here are people like me, here are people that in some ways are worse than me. I look around and I can see all kinds of problems with these people, but what makes it special is not what they bring, it's what God has done in their life, because there is something different and I do see it changing them, conforming them to be more like Christ.

2 Corinthians 4, verses 6 and 7, Paul said, For God who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure, see, it's been entrusted like a treasure to us earthen vessels to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

You are the vessels of gospel ministry and the neglect of a newborn Christian breaks the heart of God.

[ 23 : 38 ] The vessels are designed to minister to the new believer and to raise up every believer in the faith. Christ does not abandon his own. He gives you biblical gospel ministry so that you will grow in the faith in knowledge and in hope.

Number four, this is our final point, the order of gospel ministry. Verses 4 and 5, there's order to how God does this through the church.

It's the structure he sets up. Verses 4 and 5 say, To Titus, my true child in a common faith, grace and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ our Savior.

This is why I left you in Crete so that you might put what remained in order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. Put in order what remained.

And how do you put it in order? You appoint elders, plural, in every town. Well, the greeting is interesting as well. This is common salutation that Paul uses.

[ 24 : 48 ] But notice, he immediately wants to draw our attention. Grace. Now, grace we know comes through faith, not by works. So he's emphasizing, you are saved not by anything you do, not by anything you've done to your body, like circumcision, not by the way you dress or what you do or do not eat.

You are saved by grace through faith in Christ. Grace and peace. Now, the peace here, it's important how he links it. This peace comes from God, so it's an otherworldly love for God, which shows up as holiness and godliness in your life.

And because you love God, it translates also into love for others, which he calls peace. The reference next is to shepherds.

You know, appoint elders. Another word is bishops. And this is actually something that is so missed today. Look, knowing the geography of Crete, you know that these little villages are scattered along the coast with limited access, limited communication between them.

And every single town he specifies is to have elders in the plural. So, this is one of many examples in the New Testament where we see a clear instruction that there will be congregations in every town.

[ 26 : 12 ] And Titus does not have a role of being, you know, like a supreme bishop or pope over all of these congregations. Isn't how we understand this. In fact, we know Titus leaves here and goes to Dalmatia very soon.

But every town is to have a plurality of elders. See, neither is there to be one person, one charismatic personality that raises up and calls all the shots.

No, the Holy Spirit within the body of the congregation with, you know, the sending, you know, the apostolic sending like a missionary to help disciple and raise up qualified elders.

You might look around and say, there's no one qualified. Well, what do you think Titus was there to do? He's there to disciple them and trust the Holy Spirit, minister the word. God will raise up a plurality of elders for every single church and congregation and town.

Isn't that a wonderful promise, a truth? Jeremiah 23 reminds me of this promise. He says, I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and I will bring them back to their fold and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

[ 27 : 26 ] That's a picture of the church making disciples. And verse 4, Jeremiah 23, I will set shepherds over them who will care for them and they shall fear no more nor be dismayed.

Neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord. Remember, the Lord never lies. Verse 5 of Jeremiah 23, Behold, the days are coming.

He wrote from that time point looking forward to the inaugurated kingdom of Christ which we now enjoy. The days are coming, declares the Lord. when I will raise up for David a righteous branch and he shall reign as king and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

Well, we long for the day when Christ will come, you know, for the consummate kingdom. He'll come his second time and he'll vanquish all evil and abolish the work of Satan. But we know his work is already complete and Christ is reigning, we're told.

He's reigning from the right hand of the Father in heaven and he reigns in a special way over his church. Now, here's our caution. Christ is reigning and he watches over and yes, there were angels that are looking from the throne of God over those neglected children and our hearts should break for them and in fact, we should do everything we possibly can to serve our Lord and his heart for those children while we're on this earth.

[ 29 : 02 ] But remember, Christ himself is watching over his churches and churches that fail to disciple believers in God's truth. You fail as a church, you neglect bringing them up into maturity as we're called to.

You neglect raising up and calling and discipling and training and doctrine and truth these believers in your church and then sending them out on mission. within that church is no better than those parents with the bottles of alcohol and drugs all around that pack and play with the child inside.

They're addicted to their own self-indulgence at the expense of their son's health and development. You don't need to just fear the angels alone.

You need to fear Christ himself. Hebrews 13, 17 tells us they, these elders, these shepherds in the congregation, they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will give an account to Christ.

Read the first seven chapters of the book of Revelation. Christ is coming and he will begin his judgment with the church and the judgment of the church he will begin with the elders, those who have claimed leadership over his elect people, his true believers who are in those churches because Christ does not abandon his own.

[ 30 : 27 ] He gives you biblical gospel ministry so you will grow in faith, knowledge, and hope. Are you born again to a living hope of eternal life in Christ?

Is your faith growing or wavering? God gave his word for the sake of your faith. Verse 1, your growth will be stunted until you place yourself within the family of God.

That's the biblical church. And why don't you come and feast? Feast on the word of God with the church. Don't just come to the Lord once.

come every time you can. Feast as regularly as you can on the healthy diet. All of God's word proclaimed to you through the vessels he's given.

It's all provided for you. And hold on to the promise, that vision of Christ that we have in Psalm chapter 2 verses 6 and 8. I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill, and I will tell of the decree the Lord said to me, you are my son.

[ 31 : 46 ] Today I have begotten you. Catch this part. Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of earth your possession.

That's how the church in Crete heard the promise. They belong to God. They are the inheritance of Christ. He will rule over all the earth.

And that's our sure foundation, our sure hope. We can come to the church where Christ reigns in a special way and be nourished. And so church, the challenge to you, the call, the command of Christ, your King Jesus, you need to do biblical gospel ministry.

That's the only way that the people of God will be nourished. lord. And yet, you■ biraz Natürlich, when you weretitel from Newton, Williams, and Lou.

And you are going to be not great.