

This Faith That's Sound

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[0 : 0 0] The Holy Ghost, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who is faked by the prophets, and I believe one holy Catholic and apostolic Church, I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Amen. In the time of tribulation, in the time of our prosperity, in the hour of our death, and on the day of judgment, good Lord, deliver us. Amen.

When you get to be fairly venerable, those four times become a little more real to you, and so I wanted to share them with you, knowing that all of you could look at your clock can decide which of those four hours is most significant to you at the moment.

Time of tribulation, the time of prosperity, which Soren Kierkegaard calls the sickness unto death, the hour of death, and the day of judgment.

So it might be helpful to you in listening to this sermon, which I hope will be fairly painless, despite this lugubrious beginning. And consider what time it is for you right now.

[2 : 0 0] I am extremely happy to be invited to preach here by David. And the reason he's doing it is because when you're an Anglican minister in this diocese, you get a certain amount of study time, and he's working on a thesis.

And so he was kind enough to ask me to come and do it, and I was kind enough to come. And I'm grateful.

We're on to the third chapter of Titus, which is about page 201 in your pew Bible.

And it would probably be helpful for you to look at it. I want to give you four pictures, four or five pictures from that chapter, which is really the chapter which enamored me to the book of Titus fairly early on in trying to understand my own Christian life.

The first picture, you could use Michael Harcourt if you want, talking to his cabinet and reminding them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient and to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show humility towards all.

[3 : 3 1] That apparently doesn't come naturally. And the fact that Paul starts by saying, remind them, the fact is reminding won't work anyway, because we're constantly reminded about those things.

What you need to do is be put up against a wall and a gun pointed at you and said, this is the way you will behave. Now, it doesn't come with just reminding, because we can be reminded quite a lot, and it won't work.

It's dreaming the impossible dream, to think that people would pay their attention to that and would be reminded and would therefore do that. It's strange, isn't it?

I remember last week I talked to you about the fact that we are to be zealous for good works, to get involved in doing good.

And in explaining that, at least in part, Paul writes to Titus and says, remind these people that they are, in the course of their relationship to the great human adventure, which in our case is Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, the Western world, we are all involved in a great human adventure, and our part in it is serve, if we can, be reminded to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show humility towards all men.

[5 : 21] Well, that's very good advice, which is honored in being ignored almost universally by most people.

Even if you honor it in lip service, very few of us could get to it in our sort of natural condition. There's a lovely picture in this chapter of the church, and I'd like you to see that, that picture of the church.

And it begins in verse 8, when it says, I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. So Titus is told, when you're putting the church together, we've just, we've tried to get people to work within the state, now we're trying to get them to work within the church, and the function of the church, it seems, is to take the people who have believed in God and trusted in God and to teach them to be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

Because that is excellent and we have, we like our life to be marked by excellence. Not only is it excellence, it's profitable for everybody if we do that.

[6 : 50] The reality of what church life is for most people is given in verse 9. Foolish controversies, genealogies, arguments, quarrels about the law, not excellent and profitable, but unprofitable and useless.

So you get that, the church slipping from what it's meant to be into this degraded condition. From being a place of profitable excellence to being a place of unprofitable uselessness.

And somewhere between those two poles, you could probably get rid of most of the churches in Vancouver. then, you see, it goes on to say that one of the peculiar things that churches do is they provide incubation for divisive persons.

and, uh, you know, it's because the church takes a position theologically and and, uh, says how you are to behave that somebody can come in and choose not to believe that and choose not to behave that way and, uh, they live in defiance and, and they, they get, that's where they get their jollies from, if you want, from being divisive.

And, uh, we have hearts that, uh, we're constantly fairly divisive. And, uh, Paul says you've got to get rid of those people.

[8 : 37] You don't have to condemn them because they are self-condemned. But, somehow, you've got to get rid of them. Now, this turns out to be, as you will see, a kind of low view of humanity.

And, uh, the great delight that I take in chapter three of Titus is what I think of as a razor sharp incisive definition of the the natural condition of human life.

Do you want to know how human life works? And you can see it in the Union Hall, you can see it in the Arbutus Club, you can see it in the parish, you can see it in the Vancouver Club, even.

It all, it works the same everywhere. And what is it? And Paul says that it was true of him, and the reason I enjoy this verse is because, uh, I find it is true of me, I, I understand this way of life.

And it's there in verse three, in all its magnificence, where it said, where Paul says to Titus, our human condition in which we existed at one time, was that we were foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.

[10 : 13] We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. Now, it would make it a lot simpler if when you read your paper in the morning, instead of having the editorial page and the financial page and the, uh, the sports page and dividing the newspaper up that way, you could very easily divide it up into these sections.

One section on the foolish, one section on the disobedient, one section on the deceived, one section on those enslaved by passions and pleasures.

It's usually called the entertainment page. Uh, and, uh, then a page on malice, a page on envy, and then a kind of social register of those who hate and those who are hated in return for their hating.

And that would cover most of what's in the newspaper on any given day. It would all be there. You could even divide the CBC News up into those sections if you wanted to.

Because that is how human beings behave. Now, I don't mean to shock you by this, but, uh, I want you to know that this is extremely sophisticated behavior.

[11 : 40] This is not gross, ignorant, misbehavior. by rebellious and stubborn people. This is enormously sophisticated.

I mean, we know about hating and hating one another. We know that it's not politically correct to hate people publicly. But, uh, that doesn't change the underlying condition at all.

You see, so, there you have it. And it's, it's wonderful because what it says about us is that, that we are foolish, and that means we are ignorant.

Uh, it's the same word that Jesus used when he met the disciples on the road to Emmaus on the first Easter day and said, you fools and slow heart who understand all that was written in the prophets.

you should know this, but you don't know it. You are foolish, Jesus said. And Paul said, that is the human condition.

[12 : 47] There is much to be known, much that has been made available to us, and we have foolishly ignored it. That's part of the condition of being a human being.

The second part of the condition that it talks about is that you are disobedient. when we are disobedient. Remember, Paul says, we at one time.

We are disobedient because we know how to behave, we just don't behave that way. Most of us know how to be fathers, but we're not very good at being fathers.

Most of us know how to live together in families, but we are in rebellion for some deep reason within ourselves. So on the one hand, we are foolish because we don't know what we ought to know and what's been made available to us.

We are disobedient because what we do know we are not prepared to obey. And the third condition, Paul says, of our humanity is that we are deceived.

[13 : 55] And the wonderful word there is the word from which plant comes. humans. And when the ancient astronomers looked at the night sky, they saw these planets that didn't seem to be operating according to any rule at all, but seemed to wander through the night sky without law or regulation of any kind.

people. And Paul says the natural human condition is we wander. We wander from jogging to philosophy to music to art.

We wander all over the place looking for something, but the wandering lust is in us and we keep wandering and wandering and never becoming established anywhere.

So Paul says that's our human condition. That's how human beings behave. And that's true to my experience. And I dare say it's true to your experience as well, those three things.

And then it says about us that we are enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. And if you look carefully in the New Testament, passions and pleasures are both good words.

[15 : 10] they're both good things to do. They're both things that we do passionately and things we derive pleasure from. But the key to it is that human beings, with regard to it, become addicted or enslaved by it.

And so what should be the joy of passion and pleasure in our life becomes enslavement. the sickness unto death.

And it's then Paul goes on. He says we lived in malice and envy. That's the pattern of our relationships to one another.

man. I, I, I, when you achieve some status in life, you bear malice towards those who think you don't deserve it.

And when you haven't achieved status in life, you live in envy of those who have. So that pretty well covers us all, doesn't it? Look around you and you'll see the congregation is equally divided between those to whom you bear malice and those whom you end up.

[16 : 27] In a very polite and sophisticated way to which you would talk only to your wife about it. But that's, that's, that's the way we relate.

And then it goes on to say, finally, we are hateful and hating one another. remember, the topic of this sermon has to do with love.

And you see, the natural expression of this way of life is a kind of controlled hatred. That's what civilization seems to be a lot of the time, is controlled hatred.

And you, it's very hard to get beyond that. Because not only have you the ability to hate, but you have the ability to attract hate towards yourself.

And we do that with a high degree of competence. And so, that's, that's the human condition. That's the way human beings work.

[17 : 33] You see, and Paul is not saying that this is original sin about which we have no choice. But Paul is saying, this is the life which we commit ourselves to in the structures of the societies to which we belong.

And you see, the futility of saying to a group of people like this, remind them to be subject to rulers, authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show humility towards all men.

How on earth could you do that? If you are foolish, disobedient, deceived, committed to and addicted to divers lusts and passions, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

You see, the glorious contrast there is between what we are reminded to do and what Paul reminds us we are. Something has to happen.

I'm coming to it quickly. Look at verse 4. And verse 4 has the word epiphany in it.

[18 : 57] And we talk about Christ, the epiphany of Christ. Suddenly, in the darkness of our world, the light breaks out something phenomenal comes onto the horizon that changes the whole picture.

And what is it that happens? Look at verse 4. The kindness and love of God our Savior appears. And then look, you see, what it is, what it says is that He saves us.

He brings us through the washing of rebirth. He renews us by the Holy Spirit. He pours on us generously that Holy Spirit.

And He does this through Jesus Christ, our Savior, so that we, justified by His grace, become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

This is a trustworthy saying. You see, something radically has happened. And the thing that has happened is that God has done for you what you might waste the whole of your life trying to do for yourself.

[20 : 20] See, the logic of this passage is that if in fact we ourselves are foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and passions, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another, and I hope you memorized that.

The difficulty is that if that's our condition, how do you change it? What option is there? And we can just resign ourselves to saying, well, that's what it is to be human in our dog-eat-dog world, and that's the only way you can survive.

But Paul says, no, something radically different has happened. And we can't overcome that condition by ourselves. Only God can overcome that condition, and he has done it.

And what he wants to do is to take your life and mine, which is based on that fundamental reality of our foolishness, disobedience, and to shift the basis of our life onto the fact that we have become heirs of a great inheritance.

It's been made available to you and to me as communities on this earth and as individuals. This has been made available to us by the activity of God who has saved us, who has brought us to new birth, who has renewed us by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out, the Spirit whom he poured out generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we are justified by his grace, we have become heirs, we have the hope of eternal life.

[22 : 09] You see what a categorically different description that is of you and me. That's your life and that's what you've got to stay in touch with. That's what we need to stay in touch with.

That's what we need to keep each other in touch with. I don't need to help you and you don't need to help one another be deceived, disobedient, foolish, to teach you to be enslaved to certain addictions, passions, and pleasures.

You don't need help doing that. What you need help is, is finding some alternative to that. And that help, you see, is what God has given us in Jesus Christ and we are meant to avail ourselves of that inheritance.

It's as though, you know, somehow you got a letter today and that letter said, you know, there's a write-up about one of the Lord's, who's 18 years old and in his last form of upper school and he's just inherited 9,500 acres in a castle that's been in the family for 100,000 years almost.

Well, it's, this, this inheritance is spiritually and eternally far more significant than that. And it's yours. It's yours because God has done for you in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit what you could not do for yourself and that becomes the reality of your life.

[23 : 46] And you see, it's out of that, it's out that we can devote ourselves to doing good because we've suddenly been relieved of trying to overcome this essential human problem.

You see, most of our, most of our life's energy is given to trying to struggle with our foolishness, our disobedience, our deception, most of our, our addictions, our enslavements, we spend our time trying to overcome them.

and that has been overcome for us in Christ so that we are free to do good works. That's what we are to devote our life to.

We don't have to prove ourselves in the sight of society. We don't have to achieve great goals never achieved by humankind before. We don't have to gain great power or great wealth because the greatest power and the greatest wealth has been conferred on us by God through Jesus Christ and in doing that he has poured his Holy Spirit generously into our lives and that's the basis on which we are to live.

And you see, when you have people living on that basis then it's not difficult. I mean, it makes some sense that people like that you can remind them to be subject to rulers, authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good.

[25 : 30] That they don't need to slander anybody and they can be peaceable and considerate and show humility towards all. That's possible now. You are free to do it.

You won't compromise your future by that. You are free to do it. And when he comes to talking about the church, you are free now to devote yourselves to doing what is good.

Whether that's going to be a missionary in Tierra del Buego or whatever it may be, you are free to devote yourself to do that. You are free to devote yourself to the achievement of excellence and things that are profitable for everybody the world over.

Well, that's how it's put before us. And then you see, it's a very ordinary kind of thing because it has to do with ordinary people like you and me.

It has to do with your life. I because you see, in a wonderful way, Paul goes from there and says, as soon as I sent Artemis or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis because I have decided to enter there.

[27 : 05] These are very ordinary domestic things. He wants the companionship of Titus. He's sending in Artemis and Tychicus to take over from Titus on the island of Crete.

He wants Titus to join him for the winter in mid-Greece, which might be a bad place to spend the winter, comparable to northern California or something. But those are ordinary things.

Do everything you can, remember? People who are zealous for good works, do everything you can to help Zenos, the lawyer, which is a very strange thing to help lawyers.

And Apollos, who is a great preacher, help them on their way because they're going in to help with the problem of the congregations of Crete being brought up in deception and disobedience and foolishness and all those things.

Apollos and Zenos are going in for that purpose. And then you see, he says that our people have to learn to devote themselves to doing what is good.

[28 : 17] And in that doing what is good, they are to provide for daily necessities and to individually live productive lives.

people and our economy is in peril at the moment because there's too many unproductive people in our society.

And he says part of being zealous to do what is good is to live productively and you're free to do that. and then he ends with everyone with me sends you greetings because you're in the company of those who have trusted God, who have claimed what God has done for them as the basis of their life rather than what they do for God as the basis of their pride.

You've got that people and they greet and encourage one another as you are meant to greet and encourage one another within the community of this congregation. And he ends with greet those who love us in faith.

A whole new kind of relationship is established because of what God has done for us in Christ so that the natural attraction by which we might love one another is replaced by a faith in which there is a compelling love for one another whether we find them attractive or not because of the God who has loved us whether he found us attractive or not.

[30 : 01] And that's what we're called to be. Be great. Father, thank you very much for this word and help us in the circumstances of our individual lives to work through the vast inheritance that you have given us in Christ.

And even as you have poured your Holy Spirit abundantly on your people through the ages, will you pour your Spirit upon us as we continue in worship.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.