

The Raw Material Of Our Church

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[0 : 00] Our God, as we turn to your word, we ask that you will speak to our hearts. And that speaking to our hearts, we may know that it is us to whom you are speaking.

We won't make any mistake of thinking you're speaking to someone else. But that you will give us grace to hear what we need to hear. Each of us in the special circumstances of our own lives. In Christ's name, amen. Amen. This is the season of Lent.

And in the season of Lent, we ask the questions and conduct the investigation into our personal lives.

In order that we might understand why it was that on Good Friday, Jesus Christ was crucified.

[1 : 20] A lot of people don't understand that. Lots of people think that that's unnecessary. When Good Friday comes, we want to be very careful in that day to hold before people the story of the crucifixion.

To tell all the details that the gospels give us about it. In order that we might understand why it was that a good man was taken out and nailed to a cross and left to die.

Death is a very significant event in our lives. I thrill with absolute horror at the thought of that plane accident this week.

People flying along are suddenly ripped from their seats. That's the end. That's the end. And it seems strange that the lesson in church this morning says something very similar.

You know, it says, do you think that those people whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, there was a big religious festival in Jerusalem and the people brought in their lambs and goats to be killed.

[2 : 43] And they were in the process of putting them to death as a sacrifice in accordance with the scriptures when Roman soldiers moved in among them with their swords drawn and put to death the very people who were preparing the sacrifices.

And just as we sort of thrill with horror at an accident like that this week, so the people of that day presumably thrilled with horror and they wondered about it.

And why did those people die? Of course, we equate death with something has gone wrong. You know, we don't take it as being very natural. And so sometimes we make the assumption that those people in some way deserve to die.

And then the other side of that is that we don't because we're better than they are. And Jesus gives this terribly solemn statement. Do you think that those Galileans were worse sinners?

And because they suffered thus? And Jesus said, I tell you, no.

[3 : 56] But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. And perish is a word that they use in the New Testament to describe death.

And, but it's not, it's not just death that it describes. It's meaningless death, you know, that it's wiped, it's being sort of being wiped out and nothing matters.

It doesn't, it never has had any meaning and it never will have any meaning. And he says that that's the end for us. And so he points to the fact that during the course of our lifetime, there is very, very, there's something very important, which God has to do.

Now, I'm very interested in the scouts and venturers that are here this morning and want to tell you how very welcome you are. But I have to warn you that this is a kind of sad and difficult season for us in the church because we're trying to look at some sad and difficult issues.

And what we're doing as a congregation may be of some interest to you. And I'll tell you a little bit about it. And in telling you hope to tell everybody else in the congregation too.

[5 : 11] We're studying one letter that Paul wrote to Titus. And if you were to look in your blue Bible, which looks something like that and is in the pew in front of you, and if you were to turn to

page 201, you would see where we are in the letter.

And you'd begin to, I hope, I just want to talk to you about this little passage. It's a tough passage, I must say, because it describes the raw material out of which a church is made.

You know, that the raw material is people. And these people were very raw indeed. You know, in order to make a fine, beautiful guitar, you might have to go up to the islands, and they're cut down out of the woods with a screaming chainsaw and a singing axe, a great Sitka spruce.

And you would limit and cut it and drag it away in a truck and saw it up with a huge saw, having barked it with a huge machine. And finally, you would get down to the lovely wood that you need to build your guitar.

Well, the raw material of the church is just as raw and probably needs just as rough treatment in order to get people to the place where God wants them to be.

[6 : 58] Now, I want you to know that I, too, was once a scout. And most of my recollections about being a scout was that it was a very strong reminder of what raw material I was and how much had to be done in order to...

God had to do something with my life. And I think he did. But this is the raw material out of which churches are built. Now, the letter is, as you will see, a letter of Paul, to Titus.

And Titus was on the island of Crete. And Crete is the southernmost island, which is a part of the continent of Europe, in the Mediterranean, directly below what we call the Greek Peninsula.

And there was a great, great civilization there a long time ago, bullfighting. And do you know where those... where young people used to sort of dance with the bulls and get thrown into the air by them?

And they did it not in the manner of a bullfighter, but more in the manner of a ballet dancer. And they used the bull's enormous strength to throw them into the air and then they sort of cartwheeled through the air.

[8 : 16] Well, this all started in a great Minoan civilization, which was in Crete, where you'll be impressed to know they had flush toilets 2,000 years before Christ.

Something that didn't develop again until the 1800s in Western Europe. That's a bit incidental. But it's also, I think, a strong reminder that...

that... civilizations come and go. You know, we're very anxious to preserve cultures.

And I don't think we can. I mean, this was a great, great civilization. In many ways, I suppose, superior to ours, at least in some respects. And yet it's disappeared and there's hardly a trace of it left.

In fact, there was hardly a trace of it left by the time Paul went there. So, I imagine that what we should be thinking about in terms of cultures and civilizations is not preserving the ones that have been, but building the ones that will be.

[9 : 37] And that's where Paul's ministry, I think, comes in. As he says to Titus, this young man, he says, I want you to do this. But then he says, this is the raw material you're going to have to work with and those are the Cretans.

Now, do you see chapter 1, verse 12? He says, one of themselves, that is a Cretan, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars.

It's not hard to be always a liar. You learn it fairly soon in life.

And the way you learn it is you tell one lie, one really good one. I mean, it's got to be a pretty good one. And then you spend the rest of your life telling lies to cover up the original lie that you told.

Once you get a lie well established in your life, then you just go on and on from there. And this whole civilization was that way, that nobody told the truth anymore because they didn't want anybody to know.

[10 : 43] And that doesn't make them very different from us, but it does mean that they were recognized to be liars. There is, of course, a problem, which I suppose the most acute of the scouts in the front row will have already picked up, and that is that you get into a logical problem if a Cretan by the name of, if you look at the bottom of the page, you'll see his name was Epimenides, says that all Cretans are liars, and he is a Cretan.

So does that mean that all Cretans are liars? Or is he lying? Well, Paul goes on to say he's not lying.

He's telling the truth on this occasion. Cretans are always liars, it says. They are evil beasts. And if I was to translate that exactly what it says, your Sunday morning consciences would be deeply

offended, so I'm not going to translate it for you.

Monday morning, you could handle it, but Sunday morning, you would find it a bit offensive, so I won't pass it on to you. But when it says evil beasts, that's what it means.

And then they were lazy and greedy. Evil, beastly, lazy, and greedy. That's the people that Paul had to work with.

[12 : 19] That was their natural sort of state. That's who they were. Now, as you look around you, there's no people like that here. But, well, look again, and you'll see.

Now, what it says about them is that they gave heed to Jewish myths. That is, their whole life was built up on lies. Most people realize that we live on lies.

The difference is their lies were communicated by teachers that went around. Ours come over the television. And everybody knows that they're myths and they're not true, but we tend to build our lives on them.

And we tend to accept the commands of people who reject the truth. You know, the difficulty with being, you know, a religious type like me, a minister, is that most people don't want to be told what to think.

They only want to be told how to behave, you know. So, if I say, you know, get down and rub your nose in the dirt, and I say it with enough authority, then people will get down and rub their nose in the dirt.

[13 : 39] You know, just, there you are. If you, say, shave your head, or do this or that or the other thing, people tend to like to be told what to do, and they do quite ridiculous things because people command them.

They take authority and say, do this. If anybody asks you why you're doing anything so silly, you say, well, I was told to. And so, that's the way they behaved.

They took orders. They took commands. They gave authority to people who rejected truth. So that the result is, it says about them, and you can, I mean, you can read all this there.

The result of this is that they were corrupt, unbelieving people. And they professed one thing. They professed to believe in God, but they did something else so that you could see the split personality right there, that what they professed to be and what they did were two different things.

[14 : 41] I don't know quite how that Scout promise came out this morning, but I was glad for the escape clause that they had built into it about trying my best to please God.

That's not an absolute condition. There's got to be some negotiation around that. And so, that's what these people did. They were in the position where they knew better than they did, you know, when you're disobedient and corrupt and your mind and conscience have been twisted.

Now, he says in the midst of that, he says to the pure, all things are pure. And so, you may assume that you're one of the pure people.

And the fact is, maybe you are. But pure doesn't, I don't think it means pure. I think it's a, I don't know how to translate it for you, but if there are doctors in the congregation, you'll be glad to know that the word is catharsis, you know, that it's healing.

Now, I'm getting to be very old and very decrepit, you know. And if I was to go out this afternoon and run a mile, they would probably bury me about Thursday of this week.

[15 : 59] Now, if you went out and ran a mile this afternoon, some of you, you would be infinitely better for it. You probably should do it.

Because for you, it would just make you very well indeed. The same thing that would kill me would make you well. And that's what I think it means, you see. That, to the pure, these people who, where this process of healing is going on, where people have come to believe in God, then what happens is that even when they do things that aren't very good or very helpful or maybe very hard or very difficult or even very sinful, the end result of that is good because God is able to redeem it and to take even evil things and make them good in your life as you are forgiven and restored and renewed in the same way that that's, that's what happens to you.

So, that's what it is. Now, Paul tells Titus to take this raw material and he says you've got to rebuke them with all authority.

That is, lay it on them. Tell them, this is the way it is. And, and I think that that's very important that we take it seriously. I think the whole season of Lent is a season in which we should hear how it really is.

you see the process of what happens because this is a process. Let me just repeat it for you. Liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons, giving heed to Jewish myths, commands of men who reject the truth, corrupt in mind and conscience and unbelieving, professing one thing, doing another, detestable, disobedient because they know better.

[17 : 54] and then they say unfit for any good deed. Now, when I was in Scouts, one of the things they pressed on you was the idea of doing a good deed every day.

I don't know whether that still happens or not. But, the thing I discovered most about being in Scouts was that I was unfit for any good deed. And what Paul says here is that there are a lot of people who couldn't possibly do a good deed every day because they are unfit for doing it. There's something wrong with them as persons. Okay? Now, that's the raw material that Titus has to work with to build a church. There it is.

Clear and well-defined. And, may God give us grace not to say that's them over there, but that's us. I mean, we have to look at it that way.

Well, I want to finish now, but, what I, the reason I want to, the thing I want to do as I finish is to say this to you.

[19 : 09] Once we've got to the place where we recognize that we are unfit for any good deed, then something has to happen to make us fit for good deeds.

In other words, something has to happen to change us. Something really radical has to happen to change us. I don't think we can change ourselves.

Try as we might, I don't think we can do it. You can try, but I, my experience is that it's not very successful. successful. And what happens is what, the change that takes place is a change that takes place and, uh, explains to you at the same time why Jesus Christ died on the cross.

Jesus Christ is called, in Titus, our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was crucified crucified on a hill shaped like a skull outside the city of Jerusalem.

And if you went out to the airport right now and got on a plane, within 24 hours you could be at that hill outside, at that city, uh, the place where Christ was crucified.

[20 : 28] You could be there. But, there's a sense in which that reality can be here for you right now. Because Jesus Christ is our Savior.

here. And the picture is that you're on the hill and you are surrounded by your enemies, by the forces that are at work in your world that are going to destroy you ultimately.

And you're caught there and they're coming at the hill from every side and they're going to destroy you. And Jesus Christ, our Savior, comes and meets us at that point.

And he takes the battle from us and fights it for us, allowing us to escape. That's, uh, that's what it means that he's our Savior.

That he comes and stands in the place where we are and dies the death that we deserve. And we recognize that we escape because he chose not to.

[21 : 37] That we who are liars, lazy beasts, evil gluttons, all these things, that we who deserve to die are saved by Christ, our Savior, who chose to die for us.

So that the big question for us is not how am I to be good and how am I to do the things that I would like to do and know I ought to do but don't do.

The big question is for us, can I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ as my Savior, the one who will come and take my place, the one who has died for me in order that I may live?

That's what the church is all about, you see. The church is made up of this raw material but only after this raw material has begun to recognize what God has done for us in Christ by his death on the cross.

And so that's why the question is, do you believe in Jesus Christ? And the answer we need to come to is, yes, I do. And I believe he died for me.

[23 : 01] And when God shows that to you through his word, then you'll know why you're to read his word and put yourself under the judgment of it in order that it may be not for you a condemning experience which destroys you but a totally cathartic experience in which you come through it and you're made an infinitely better person because of what Christ has done.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.