

This Faith We Share

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[0 : 00] Our God, we ask that as we turn our minds and hearts to your word, you will, by your Holy Spirit, give us understanding, enable us to obey, and fill our hearts and minds with a sense of your great glory.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. If you look at Acts chapter 2, just momentarily, and I don't insist that you find this, but I will insist that you look up Titus in a minute or two.

But in Acts chapter 2, it talks about the first Pentecost Sunday, and there were Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia and Judea and Cappadocia and Pontus and Asia and Phrygia and Phanphylia, Egypt, the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene and visitors from Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians.

We heard them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. And where all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, What does this mean?

That was the birthday of the church that Pentecost Sunday and the coming of the Holy Spirit in response to the sermon preached by Peter. And we are a community of the Holy Spirit gathered on this Lord's Day to hear God's Word.

[1 : 57] The reason I read you that was that we're talking about the epistle of Paul to Titus, which you will find in your pew Bible on page 100, on page 200, sorry.

There it is. On page 200. And it would be helpful, I hope, if you would turn to that. Because among the list of people who were in Jerusalem, there were Cretans.

And within the lifetime of the New Testament, those Cretans had returned home. And there was, perhaps on the basis even of some of them, a church established in Crete.

And this letter is to Titus on the island of Crete in the western Mediterranean, telling him how to organize the church there.

Now, when they were in Jerusalem, and they saw this strange communication taking place, where all these people from all these ethnic groups and all these different languages heard in their own language what was being said, they asked the Pentecost question, what does this mean?

[3 : 30] And I want you to ask that question this morning. I want, I mean, for the moment to put yourself as a stranger from Generation X in our brave multicultural society as represented in this congregation gathered in this church on this Sunday morning.

and the, this, this society that we live in, which has firmly committed itself to do what God has forbidden with death, death-defying bravery, to eat, as it were, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so that, that that's, that's, if somebody from that culture came here and asked us what we're about, we might have some difficulty answering it.

Now, I say that because we, we live in a very brave pioneering society, and what people have never done before out of, uh, what they take to be the dishonest and impious fear of God, uh, that is impious because they didn't respect the truth more, uh, that, they asked the question about our society, I mean, you see, when I preach to this congregation, which I've done before, and, uh, I, I have always been very aware that we talk about marriage to lots of people who are divorced and lots of people who are single, we talk about the moral rightness of heterosexual behavior behavior as opposed to the immorality of homosexual behavior, we talk about the poor to a lot of people who are rich, and I don't know that in some strange way we don't,

Sunday by Sunday, uh, alienate most of the people in this congregation, uh, for one reason or another, and so it's a great surprise that you come back, and I'm, I'm, I'm glad to see you all here for that reason.

Well, you see, there's something very strange going on, and, uh, and it's, uh, it's like this.

[6 : 27] Uh, when Paul writes his letter to Titus, he, uh, he's writing it and, uh, saying to them, giving them, in a sense, an answer to the question that came up at Pentecost when people seeing, hearing the message being preached by Peter and seeing the response of a wonderful variety of people from a wonderful number of different resources and asking, what does this mean?

And then when you turn to the epistle to Titus, you see what it means. And Paul describes what it means.

Uh, look, if you will, in, in the, in the first verse here, or not the first verse, but the first paragraph, where it says that, uh, it talks about a God who does not lie.

Now, we live in a world in which, uh, religion generally is regarded to be a rather soothing lie, you know, against the harsh reality and the cruelty and the sorrow and the hunger and the deprivation that is imposed on millions of people on this globe.

It may be in some ways helpful to them, like an anesthetic is helpful to you when you face surgery, help them not to feel the pain.

[8 : 15] And so we invent a whole lot of religions which serve the beneficial purpose of helping people not to feel the pain of their lives.

And, uh, so it's a bit surprising that in the midst of that generous and beneficent religious instinct and impulse of man, Paul comes along and says, but I want to tell you about a God who does not lie.

I mean, that's what we think gods are for, is to tell us believable lies so we can hide from the harsh reality of our world. And Paul comes along and says, this God of whom I speak is a God who does not lie.

In Hebrews, you read about this God that it is impossible, this is chapter 6 and verse 18, it is impossible for God to lie.

That's one of the limitations that God has put upon himself that he hasn't put upon us. And so we find God difficult to understand because when we're cornered, we just lie.

[9 : 31] When he's cornered, he can't. It's impossible for him to do it. And so, you have Paul talking about this God who does not lie.

human beings are so clever that not only can they lie to themselves, but they can teach themselves to believe what they know to be a lie.

So we're very complex individuals. And it's into that that Paul addresses himself when he talks about a God who does not lie.

You see, it's been the issue ever since the beginning of the Bible when Adam and Eve were in the garden and there was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and Eve told them that God had said, you're not to eat of that tree.

And the serpent with great beauty and great charm and great cunning said, he didn't surely mean that. which meant he's a liar.

[10 : 39] And that you would have the knowledge of good and evil if you ate of that. And so you remember that's what they did. They chose to treat God as a liar.

So along comes Paul with the gospel of Jesus Christ and says, we have to deal deal with to do with a God who does not lie.

You know, I mean, if you're not going to lie you better get out of the religion business. You know, that's about the way it looks to people. But Paul makes it very clear that this is a God who does not lie.

Well, it goes on from there to tell you this, that this God who does not lie made a promise before the beginning of time.

Do you see where it says that at the end of verse two of chapter one? This God who does not lie promised before the beginning of time. So if time marks the whole of creation and you try and project in your mind back to a time before time and in that time before time God makes a promise and that promise is really boiled down to its essence Jesus Christ.

[12 : 18] That's the promise made before the foundation of the world. And so before the whole of creation the God who doesn't lie made a promise in which he didn't lie.

And he fulfills that promise with the coming of Jesus Christ. Then if you look a little further you find that while you move from the beginning of time when a promise was given into a point in time when that promise was fulfilled by the coming of Jesus Christ.

So you get before time then you move into the heart of time and at the very pinnacle of human history the singular event which stands at the heart of our faith the incarnation of Jesus Christ that becomes the point in time fulfilling a promise which came from before time.

And then if you go on and see what else happens you find that in verse 3 this God appointed a season when he brought his word to light through preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior.

So then you have the beginning of time the point in time and then you have a season in which preaching takes place and that's the season in which we live.

[13 : 57] But this is peculiar preaching that takes place. It's apostolic preaching. It is preaching in accordance with that witness of the apostles to Jesus Christ so that the preaching is to emerge not out of the accumulated wisdom of man in his search of the meaning of the universe about which there is no end but it's a preaching which comes out of the decisive act at a point in time that God fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ.

So you have that preaching which Paul says was entrusted to him through the command of God our Savior.

And that's what we're doing here. So what happens is when you come to a place like Vancouver in the 20th century nearing the end of it and we have a wonderful group of people who say they belong to the new age.

The Christian has to come along and say well I don't belong to the new age I belong to the now age. You know now the God who promised in the beginning has fulfilled his promise at a point in time in the birth of Jesus Christ and in this season of time this fulfilled promise is proclaimed to all the world so that they may focus on it and now is the accepted time.

Today is the day of salvation. Now is the time when you must confront God. Even the new agers find I mean it's a very difficult thing not to live in the future.

[16 : 14] It's a very difficult thing to say here and now. It's extremely difficult for a Sunday morning congregation to believe that here and now in this hour and in this place there is business to be done with God from the very heart of our being because now is the time in which God confronts us and speaks to us.

And though we may be humanly speaking inclined to put that time off indefinitely until there is as one of the characters until there's a convenient time to deal with the problems of religion Paul says no it's right now that's what we're here for.

Christians are to be the now generation within the new generation the new ages the now ages amongst the new ages and so you get that reality and then you see what this is all to do is to generate by this proclamation of the nowness of the purpose of God in Jesus Christ what happens look if you will in Titus verse 11 which tells about what has happened right now that the grace of God has appeared are you with it 2 will end the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all people so God is doing his thing and what he's doing is he's been likened lots of times but it's likened to the children of

Israel who were in Egypt in the midst of a totally alien culture who were enslaved whose identity as a people was slowly being dissolved through hardships and through various kinds of oppression all that was happening and they were disappearing and God moved in and under the leadership of Moses raised up his people and brought them out and so God moves into our world and raises up his people who are to be a now generation who don't live with the God who may be sometime somewhere or the God who was way back when but God who is now and God whom we have to confront now in the circumstances of our daily lives and so he goes on to say in chapter 2 in verse 11 the grace of

God has appeared now for the salvation of all people training us to say no now that's how it's that's how it's translated in the new international version where it says the grace has come and it teaches us to say no now that's a very significant thing because not only we are the now generation we are also the no generation that in the great advances of human liberation which are the proud accomplishment of the culture and the society and the times in which we live and all those things to which traditionally and historically people have said no we don't say no anymore we are a brave people who are at the center of our own destiny and are in a city creating our own lives and we are saying in this kind of world you never need to say no and so it became necessary then as it is now and if you look at it in chapter 2 verse 11 it teaches us to say no this is the new

[20 : 48] NIV translation it teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and our generation has discovered that if you say no to ungodliness and worldly passions what else is there to live for you cut yourself off from the only possibility of giving meaning to this earthly existence of ours and Paul makes it even worse by going on to say we are to live self controlled upright and godly lives in this present age now that makes no sense at all because this present age is all we have isn't it and so to say to say no within the realm of the infinite realm of possibilities of things you might do in this present age with the life you've been given to say no is a denial which in a sense undermines the very reality of our human rights you should never have to say no and that's what we're experimenting with in particularly we're conscious at least in all the areas of our sexuality let's explore them to the full let's never say no to anything and that's what's happening and so

Christians are a very awkward community indeed because they're capable of coming together under the authority of their book and saying no that's not what life is all about and then saying that there are some hard and difficult things about life but in the midst of those hard and difficult things in the midst of misunderstanding and suffering in the midst of the kind of personal agony that has that many of you have experienced in your life in the midst of all that the grace that's what that's what it says the grace of God has appeared and the grace of God it is that teaches us to say no and it teaches us to say no for one simple reason because the ultimate fulfillment of world history and the ultimate fulfillment of our lives is not what we can grab in the midst of this time it is to await our blessed hope the appearing of the glory of our great

God and Savior Jesus Christ we are not living as though fulfillment were the absolute necessity of our existence we are awaiting the blessing and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ that's what we're waiting for and so you get this wonderful sequence of a promise given before the beginning of time a point in which that promise was fulfilled through the coming of Jesus Christ a season in which the proclamation of that fulfillment was made in Jesus Christ in the preaching of the gospel and then a period in which we are able to say no to that which contradicts our blessed hope which is that at the end of time there is the coming of our great God and Savior

Jesus Christ and that's how we are to live our lives and that's what makes you as Christians a very peculiar community and one that not everybody understands or has much sympathy with so when you have that question which comes in the Acts of the Apostles when on the day of Pentecost they saw this new reality of a now generation a generation that was able to say no coming into being they said what does this mean and so what it means is that the promise from the beginning of time which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ the proclamation of the fulfillment of that promise through the preaching of the Apostles all this is happening so that we can be for God his people to make his love and his salvation known to all the world that's why we exist and that's what it means for us to belong to Jesus

Christ awaiting his appearing and that we are called upon to do that you see I I have this problem with you as a congregation which I passed on generously to David and that problem is that you are so blessed a people and you are so privileged I think to have been called together by God you are so privileged to have been made into a people of God to fulfill his purpose through the apostolic message that you are you are all those things and you may not understand fully that God has done that in order that you may as a people bear witness to his coming again bear witness to the reality of the God who meets us right now in the message of the gospel who meets us right now in the indwelling presence of the

[28 : 00] Holy Spirit and who has made us I mean you're a wonderfully intelligent people you're a wonderfully wealthy people you're a wonderfully blessed people you're a wonderfully encouraged encouraged people and and for the purpose of proclaiming to the world making known to the world that God who made a promise before the beginning of time fulfilled that promise in the coming of Jesus Christ proclaimed that promise through the apostolic preaching of the gospel and calling you to be awaiting people who in the midst of the cultures of this world are people who are able to say no to I mean he makes it clear that you have to say no to irreligion and worldly passions and to live sober upright and godly lives in this world because our fulfillment is not something we gotta squeeze out of the circumstances of our earthly life but that our fulfillment is in

God's hands and that fulfillment comes as we meet Jesus Christ and as we await his coming again and that's that's what Paul writes to Titus about telling him that he writes telling him how to help the Christians on this island of Crete to band together and to hold on to what they've been given even as God calls you as a congregation to be very aware of the profound riches that you've been given

and to band together in the midst of an alien people alien to God and to make known God's purpose of salvation in Jesus

Christ more about Titus this time next week let me pray our God thank you that you have made the promise thank you that you have fulfilled that promise thank you that that promise becomes a now reality for us through the work of your Holy Spirit and the proclamation of your word Lord and thank you that in the midst of the chaos and confusion of our world at this time we are not called to despondency and to despair or to eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die but to wait soberly and thoughtfully because of the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ whom you have taught us to anticipate thank you for this we pray in his name amen