

The Detestables

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[0 : 0 0] And I want to add my own welcome to Dan's, to all of you who are in church this morning, particularly those who might be visiting from other countries. It's great to hear you sing the Canadian National Anthem.

And to know you stand on guard for Canada with us. That's very encouraging. Now, I want to just talk about charlatans for a moment.

A charlatan is someone who pretends to give us something that might help us or benefit us in some way. They usually do it for money or for fame.

They are showmen with the gift of the gab and they turn out to be frauds. There's a famous case in the United States of a doctor in the first half of the last century who claimed that he could cure male impotence by using goat glands.

You can ask me later. He became wealthy and famous until he was exposed as a fraud and lost his medical license.

[1 : 0 6] What's it called? You're not defrocked as a doctor, whatever it is. He lost his medical license. He then went on to create the first radio station in Kansas and made a lot more money and then twice ran for governor of Kansas.

Most of the old black and white westerns have someone who is a snake oil salesman. They're usually a lovable rogue with a heart of gold who turned good in the end of the movie.

We are not in Kansas, but I did notice a couple of months ago that in April Dr Arun Reddy was arrested in the Global Medical Clinic in Fort Saskatchewan.

He was visiting there. For 18 months he had successfully run a medical clinic in Toronto. Incidentally, he had the highest ratings on the website ratemds.com.

Just wait. Until a group of insurance companies discovered he was not a doctor at all. He was a charming deceiver. And he now faces 15 fraud charges in the courts of Ontario.

[2 : 1 5] And we can smile about it because nobody died. But if you think about it, the possibility is a nightmare. Jesus told us that he was a doctor.

You remember in Mark's Gospel? Those who are well or strong or healthy have no need of a doctor. But those who are sick, I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners.

And that's why Christians have always believed that the church is a hospital for sinners. And that Jesus is the doctor. Jesus himself is our medic.

And the life-giving medication is the gospel. And looking out this morning with everybody panting and fanning themselves, if you feel faint or if you feel like the person next to you is feeling faint, it's okay.

We are a hospital for sinners. Allow that. Stand up and go out if you need to. That'll be okay. Or if you faint, just fall on someone's soft lap and we will look after you.

[3 : 1 9] And if it gets desperate, we might get one side of the congregation to hold their breath for a little while. Where was I? Let's get to Titus, shall we? Titus is one of the smallest books in the New Testament, but it punches way above its weight.

The Apostle Paul had left this man Titus on the island of Crete with a tough assignment. There were new churches in most of the towns, what we call church plants today, and they were in a bit of a mess.

Because just as there are charlatans in the medical profession offering pseudoscience and charlatans in the financial profession offering Ponzi schemes, so there are charlatans in the church, Christian teachers offering pseudogospels.

And no sooner had the Apostle Paul left the island of Crete than a group of self-appointed teachers followed, teaching a variant of Christianity.

They said something like this, look, it's great that you've believed the gospel, you've got your sins forgiven in Jesus, but to really grow, to be really pure and strong and spiritually healthy, to go ahead, you need something more.

[4 : 34] You need special teaching, special steps, special things to do, special experiences based on stories that we can tell you, but you'll have to sign up at our conferences for \$499.

Step right up. And they're not lovable rogues with good hearts, but they're men who are set on making a fast dollar from stories that they're just making up.

And as we read, it's dividing churches, it's overturning families, and it's leading Christians out of the path of eternal life and into the path of eternal death.

And what made it so difficult on Crete is that the culture, the surrounding culture, from what we learn in the text here, was a rough, tough, and indulgent culture, and they were proud of it.

When my youngest son was in his teens, he went through the pirate stage. Those of you who are parents, did this just happen to us, or is it every young teenage, good, I'm glad to see that, goes through a pirate stage.

[5 : 44] All his male friends went through it with him. They took on pirate identities. They collected swords and eye patches and went to pirate movies. And when the guys were in our house and you'd go up and try and say something sensible to them, they would all say, arr, arr, arr.

Ar. That seemed harmless enough. But of course, for anyone who's met real pirates, it's no laughing matter. I have a friend who sailed up the coast of Somalia recently, and they were not troubled by pirates, but it was a real problem.

Well, I say all that because Crete was a pirate culture. It's on the shipping lanes, and generations of pirates had fled capture by taking refuge on the island.

And the culture had become one in which truth and self-control and gentleness were not highly valued. So to become a Christian and to follow the crucified Jesus Christ in his gentleness, in this culture, was pretty tough.

So Paul writes this letter to Titus on the island, and although the island is infested with these churchy charlatans, there's only really one section dealing with them.

[6 : 59] That's chapter 1, 10 to 16, which was the core of what was read for us today. But the great focus on the letter is not on the charlatans, but it is how Jesus brings us spiritual health and what it looks like to be spiritually healthy.

So I'm going to quickly look today at three things. First, we'll look at the churchy charlatans. Then we'll look at spiritual health and then how it comes to us. Is that all right? Are you still there?

Okay, first, let's look at these dangerous doctors, the churchy charlatans. In verse 10, you can see this is not a hypothetical problem.

There were many charming deceivers, and it's hard to get a very full picture of them, but if you look down to verse 14, they devoted themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

In other words, their teaching was based on speculation. In verse 16, we learn they're not outside the church, they're inside the church. They profess to know God. They profess to have a more perfect knowledge of God, to have a special knowledge of God, but they deny Him by their works.

[8 : 10] They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work, which is why I call this sermon the detestables. We'll come back to that in a minute.

And in verse 10, there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, namely, it should read, those of the circumcision party. You don't often hear those two words together.

But, let me try and put it together. These teachers were gospel plus teachers.

They say, yes, great for you to have faith in the gospel, but you need more. And what we can learn from here and from chapter three is they're very concerned for outward purity, purity.

But that outward purity and growth as a Christian didn't come through the gospel. It came from moving on to new practices and new rituals based on stories that they were telling.

[9 : 12] The outward behavior, lists of commands, based on all sorts of speculation which went way beyond the biblical story. Now, you might think, oh, that's all very interesting, but Vancouver is full of this kind of teaching today.

Now, recently I met a young woman who seemed to have lost a whole lot of weight. And I asked her about it and she said she is on a raw vegan diet.

That means nothing from animals and nothing cooked. And as I asked her about it, she explained that she was spiritually cleansing and it brought her closer to Gaia.

She's not a member of St. John's, you'd be pleased to know. Well, you won't be pleased to know. Steve Jobs dedicated himself to Zen Buddhism and to alternate medicine for the same reason.

And in his biography by Walter Isaacson, Isaacson implies that Jobs' refusal of traditional medicine was part of the factor in his early death. But the thing that all the philosophies that are floating around us today share in common with the false teaching in Crete is its source.

[10 : 21] In verse 14, the apostle calls it myths based on the commands of humans. All this stuff has just been made up by human beings just like you and me.

It hasn't come from God. It's come out of the human imagination. And you might wonder what the attraction was in this Jewish speculation for the Christians in Crete.

And I think that's why Paul puts that amazing quote, famous quote, in verse 12. You remember this? One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.

And then he says, this testimony is true. Paul is not being a racist. He is citing a local poet celebrity, as he does in a number of other cities when he's preaching.

And it's very hard to argue with an accepted cultural hero in their own context. So you finish this sentence for me.

[11 : 28] The typical Aussie likes... No, no, don't say it. Don't say it. Because you see, if you say it, I'm going to be deeply offended.

But I can say beer and prawns and not being polite with their opinions. Mind you, when I was at high school, we had a teacher who was from France and he called us sons of convicts, which we thought was a bit strong at the time.

Probably why I never did really well at French. I'm sure it's his fault. However, this is just the truth. Cretans were famous for loving money above most everything.

And they had made self-indulgence an art form. They were hard drinking, big eating, cheating and lying happened at all levels of society.

And why does Paul bring this quote in here? Because I think when people become Christians, in a culture that has very non-Christian values, the temptation for us as Christians is not to be less religious, but more.

[12 : 39] Not to trust the gospel alone, but to want to add all sorts of rules that will make us safe. to make us, so that we won't become contaminated.

And instead of engaging more with the culture and seeking to reach the culture, the temptation is to withdraw and set up walls and make more rules that will protect us. And that's exactly what these churchy charlatans were offering.

And that's, I think, why it found purchase. And here's the thing the apostle does with the whole book of Titus. He just sweeps the board and he says, no human practice, no ritual, no devotion can lead you one centimeter closer to God.

It can't bring the life of God to you in any way. The life of God, eternal life, only comes to us through the gospel. It's in the gospel, we'll see in just a second, that we are utterly, utterly cleansed.

It doesn't come through rules or effort. And the great irony, of course, is that those who leave the gospel behind and add all sorts of ascetic rituals and rules do not actually make themselves inwardly more cleaner, they only end up making themselves detestable.

[13 : 54] And that word in verse 16 is an Old Testament word for those who don't please God. It doesn't do much good for us either. it overturns families.

This false teaching works like gangrene. It spreads and it brings death. And that is why Paul in this section while he's dealing with them tells Titus verse 13 in no uncertain terms therefore he says rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith.

Very interesting, isn't it? He doesn't say write them off. He says engage with them, address them, perhaps they might come to repentance. The purpose of engaging them, Titus, is they might become sound in the faith.

And this word sound is a fantastic word. I know it's it sounds dull, it sounds big doctrine dogma.

The word is a medical word and it means healthy. what actually cures and makes us well and heals broken bones. And it's very interesting, our passage, the verse before our passage and the verse after our passage used the same word.

[15 : 10] Look back at verse 9 please. Speaking about the congregational elders, he must hold firm to the trustworthy word is taught so that he may be able to give encouragement literally in healthy teaching, sound doctrine.

And then chapter 2 verse 1, as for you Titus, teach what runs along the lines of what accords with sound healthy doctrine. And then the correction right in the centre there in verse 13 is rebuke them sharply that they might be sound in the faith.

Very encouraging isn't it? And maybe some will turn, maybe some won't. So that's the first point, spiritual charlatans. We've got to ask the question then, what is spiritual health look like?

And before we do that, let me just ask, how are you all going? Nobody wanting to faint? Anybody fainted? So what does spiritual health look like?

And if you have your Titus open, I just want to run through a couple of verses. This is what it looks like. Go down to chapter 2 verse 14. Jesus gave himself to redeem us from all lawlessness and purify him for himself, a people for his own possession.

[16 : 30] What do they look like? Who are zealous for good works. Chapter 3 verse 1, remind them, that's all of them, to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient and ready for every good work.

Chapter 3 verse 8, insist on those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. And again, verse 14, let our people learn to devote themselves to good works.

That is what it looks like to be spiritually healthy. The only proof that our faith in God is real is that it demonstrates itself in outward, practical action.

Confessing Christ is of no use really to anyone unless it leads to a different life, a life that's transformed. Not just a life where you're nice and not just a life if you think good thoughts of others, but dedicated to active works of service for others.

Isn't that interesting? And good works, in this case, doesn't just mean building orphanages in the two-thirds world or eradicating poverty.

[17 : 45] The good works are specifically shaped by the gospel. They come out of the gospel and they are mostly practical, mundane, ordinary Christian behavior. Next week we're going to look at chapter 2 verses 1 to 10.

And Dr. Jonathan Griffiths, a young Canadian fellow who is teaching at Regent and who is working in London is going to lead us and I'm looking forward to that.

But if you just cast your eyes down those chapter 2 1 to 10. Men, any men over 40 here? Verse 2, older men, this is what good works look like, sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith and love and steadfastness.

Women over 40, verse 3, what does it look like if you're a full-time employee? Verse 9, be submissive to your masters. They are well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of our God and Saviour.

Why? The reason is, how else is God going to reach those around us except by seeing the change within us? That last phrase of verse 10, in every way we may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

[19 : 02] The word adorn is *cosmeo*, cosmetic. In other words, what is the face of Jesus Christ to Vancouver? It's us. So God's plan for the church in every age is not that we withdraw into a holy huddle and make rules for ourselves, but that we are fully engaged with those around us, engaged in the life of the city and the community.

We're putting a face on the gospel day by day by being devoted to good works. I mean, it's obvious really, isn't it? How many people wake up in Vancouver on a Sunday morning and say, I think I'll go to church for a change?

Nor does this happen through full time paid church workers. We could hire dozens of people to run dozens of programs for evangelism, but it would be nowhere as effective as if you and I lived this gospel life because only you have access to your friends and families and co-workers and they will only see the grace of God if it is real in you.

That's the way of God in our world. He has entrusted his reputation and the reputation of the gospel to us. And I know this is difficult but it depends very much on how we live.

Whether there's actual real ongoing change in our lives or not. Whether we're spiritually healthy. We are the face of Jesus to the community and what it looks like to be spiritual healthy is to be zealous for good works.

[20 : 31] That's basically what it says. So thirdly then how does Jesus make us healthy? Where does it come from? And I'm not going to spend too long on this but where does the power and the motivation and energy come from?

Not from rituals or lists of do's and don'ts. The whole letter is written to say that it is the power of God changes us through the gospel.

gospel. The gospel begins to cure us and begins to heal us because it puts within us a hope for something else. A hope for eternal life and for complete wholeness.

So long as we live in this world we need constant treatment. That's what the book's about. Let me say it again. The way God shows his face to the world is through changed lives and the way God changes us is through the gospel.

And if we as a church are to be a community of contrast it can only happen if we are increasingly gripped by the grace of God in the gospel.

[21 : 39] And I want to just finish there are three statements of the gospel in the book and I want to work through them in reverse order very briefly with you and just show you what I mean so that you can take this away and re-read it.

Every time Paul mentions the gospel and states the gospel he explains how it transforms us. Look at chapter 3 please verse 4 this is quite well known as a Christmas reading you'll recognize it.

when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared he saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness but according to his own mercy here's the washing by washing of regeneration renewal of the Holy Spirit that's what Christ does for us in the gospel and the Holy Spirit is poured out richly on us through Jesus Christ our Savior so that that's not where it ends being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life this saying is trustworthy says Paul to Titus I want you to insist on these things so that those who believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works so who is it that devotes themselves to good works it's those who believe in God what does it mean to believe in God it means to believe this gospel or look back at chapter 2 in verse 11 for the grace of

God has appeared bringing salvation for all people training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions to live self-controlled upright and godly lives in the present age waiting for the blessed hope the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ Jesus God whom 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 isn't that great how are we changed the grace of God has appeared training us to lead godly lives training us to renounce worldly passions how does it train us well you'll have to wait until we get there and the third and final one is in the first couple of verses which you're already very familiar with I'm sure chapter one as Paul a servant of God an apostle of Jesus Christ for the sake of the faith of God's elect and knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness in other words it's the knowledge of the truth it's the faith that we have in the gospel that accords with godliness in hope of eternal life which god who never lies promised before the ages began this is amazing 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 when we become a christian we receive a completely new life narrative you know you might think of yourself as someone who grew up in flimflon manitoba and went to school in toronto and had a successful career in vancouver and hoped for retirement and in west van or whatever when you come to faith in jesus christ what happens is you discover that god has promised eternal life to you and to me before the world was made before time began god promised it we know it because he's revealed it here and we have come to know it through the preaching of the gospel as he says in verse three takes us right back into the eternal counsels of god so this is why god made the world see the church the christian church is not just something useful to god during the time that the earth moves on the church is the purpose of god in creation it is the goal of creation under jesus christ jesus incarnation and his life and death and resurrection were not an afterthought to fix up the mess that we had made it's exactly as god intended it before the foundation of the world so that he would bring many sons and daughters around jesus christ and bring us to glory through him and this is what paul is saying there's only one place where god makes this promise and there's only one place that you can hear this promise and it is through the preaching and teaching of the gospel that's why every church must have a steward chapter 1 verse 7 remember the last week's sermon an overseer bishop minister as god's steward etc someone who will preach the gospel someone who's been changed by the gospel themselves whose personal convictions are controlled by the gospel and who will faithfully teach the trustworthy word as taught by paul and rebuke those who contradict it only one gospel it's why we read through chapter 1 we talk paul talks about the faith the truth the teaching the doctrine as we hear it and we hear the bible opened and taught god himself promises us eternal life we come to know the truth the holy spirit washes us he begins to wash and continues to wash and he grows us in faith hope and love and he gives us a zeal for good works and how that happens we're going to look over the next few weeks in the meantime don't be surprised by churchly charlatans who want to change the gospel we know what they look like don't we good talkers professional theologians sometimes clergy bishops but what they offer is snake oil and it will only bring us death we need to ask ourselves i think i need to challenge myself with you this morning how's it going with our eagerness for good works if we do a spiritual health checkup are we listening to the gospel do we hear the voice of god the father promising tenderness and mercy and grace so i think the thing that i would have you pray for me and for yourselves and for us as a congregation is that we would have a greater grip on the gospel because the gospel is so vast and wonderful and that we too in return would be gripped by the gospel of grace there is

[28 : 43] going