

# The Contribution of the Church

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[0:00] Whom shall I fear? Whom shall I fear? I know who goes before me, I know who stands behind The God of angel armies is always by my side The one who reigns forever, he is a friend of mine The God of angel armies is always by my side And nothing falls against me shall slide You hold the whole world in your hand I'm holding all to your promises

You are faithful, you are faithful And nothing falls against me shall slide You hold the whole world in your hands I'm holding all to your promises You are faithful, you are faithful, you are faithful I know who goes before me, I know who stands behind The God of angel armies is always by my side The one who reigns forever, he is a friend of mine

The God of angel armies is always by my side I know who goes before me, I know who stands behind The God of angel armies is always by my side The one who reigns forever, he is a friend of mine The God of angel armies is always by my side Good morning everyone Good morning and a very warm welcome to Union Baptist Church Welcome back to those who were with us yesterday And for those who worked with us yesterday, welcome today So glad you could join us Yesterday we were here together for most of the day As part of our special weekend at home

A special weekend of being together as a church family Learning together, getting to know each other a bit better Having some more teaching, having some more worship Enjoying some special guests Being part of that time with us And it's a great privilege that we can have John and Alison Rizbridge with us today And John's going to be sharing the final part of his teaching Working through Titus Which we were really blessed by yesterday We're looking forward to hearing from him later in the service And we're very blessed to have Cyn-Desis Some of Cyn-Desis leading the worship Joel and Joanna and Seb and Alex Thank you so much for serving us this weekend And they're going to be joined today by some of our youth band Ben and Sam and Serena and Bethany and Archie So we're looking forward to being led in worship with them But as we come to prepare to worship God together Let's just take a moment just to be still and quiet Just for a moment and then I'll lead us in a prayer

Just as the worship leaders come up and take their positions Father God we thank you for who you are And we thank you for all that you've been doing in us And through us already this weekend It's so great to be able to spend time together As church family, as your family To learn together, to grow together To grow closer to you And that is our prayer for today as well That this will continue as we spend this time in worship And spending time listening to your word We thank you that you welcome us into your presence And we want to welcome your Holy Spirit

[5:04] To move among us and have your way with us this morning We pray that you would open our hearts to praise you And that what takes place in this building today Would be pleasing to you and would glorify your name We pray this in Jesus' name Amen Amen Well do please stand And I'm going to hand over to Joel and St. Lisa And everyone else And they're going to lead us in worship Thanks guys Thanks guys Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. To the praise of your glory.

[8:17] To the prince of your mercy and praise. To the praise of your glory. You are the God who saved your name.

To the praise of your glory. To the prince of your mercy and praise. In the faith of the glory You are the God who saves Yes Lord we thank you that you are the God who saves We've been saved by you, you've done that for us You've done for us what we could never do for ourselves To put us in right relationship with you To save us from the slavery of sin and death that we're subject to otherwise And we thank you that you've done that for us already Through what Jesus has done for us And we thank you that you've not just saved us and left us there But you call us to be grown by you, to be grown into your likeness And you call us to be part of your work And to be people who carry out your mission for the church

It's such a privilege that you would have us do that Lord Despite our failings And you do that so that in all things Christ will be glorified And Lord as we come to you today We just want you to be glorified in our lives We want Christ to be glorified in our lives Not just when we're here in church Not just when we're here singing But every day we want to praise you with our lives We're so thankful to you Amen We'll have an opportunity in a moment just to call out our praises to God But for now let's just continue to worship him in song Amen Amen Amen Amen Hallelujah.

Thou burning sun with broken beams. Thou still from the moon in the darkness of peace.

Oh, praise Him. Oh, praise Him. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

[11:07] Hallelujah. Halleluia. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Oh, praise Him.

Hallelujah. Then who shall for long rest be seen. Oh, creatures of our God and King.

[13:29] Oh, praise Him. Oh, praise Him. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Oh, praise Him.

Oh, praise Him. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. As we continue to worship, we'll just invite you just to call out just short prayers of praise and thanks to God for who He is and what He's done for us.

Let's praise Him now. Amen.

Amen.

Amen.

[15:45] Lord we have so much to praise you for and you're just so yeah awesome and unfathomable and we could take a lifetime trying to just figure out just how awesome and majestic you are and not even come close and yet you call us to be close to you and to have that relationship with you and be able to call you Father and we're just so thankful to you Amen let's continue to praise God in the darkness we were waiting without hope without light from heaven you came running there was mercy in your eyes just fulfill the Lord and prophets to a virgin care the one on the home of endless glory to a crazy leader praise the Father praise the Son praise the Spirit in one

God of glory majesty praise forever to the King to the King to reveal the kingdom come and to reconcile the Lord to redeem your whole creation you did not despise the cross for he through the Lord Be sure to the other side, knowing this world of salvation, we live for our sake to die.

Oh, praise the Father, praise the Father, praise the Son, praise the Spirit, be upon you, God of glory and majesty, praise forever to the King of grace.

Amen. Be the Father of the soul, and the church of Christ is born, there's a spirit, there's a place, and his gospel to a forehold, shall not fear, shall not faint.

But his blood, his name, in his freedom I am free, for the love of Jesus Christ, who has resurrected me.

[19:42] Oh, praise the Father, praise the Father, praise the Son, praise the Spirit, free in one.

God of glory and majesty, praise forever to the King of grace.

Praise the Father, praise the Son, praise the Spirit, free in one.

God of glory and majesty, praise forever to the King of grace.

Praise forever to the King of grace. Amen. Amen. Do please sit down.

[20:55] Now, for those of you that weren't able to join us yesterday, we had a fantastic time.

Just ask anyone who was there, they can fill you in about some of the highlights. We had some great worship like this in the morning from St. Deitus. We had great teaching from John on the Book of Titus.

And in the afternoon we had a variety of different sessions, activities and seminars to choose from, one on reaching the nations, which Alison led. We had drama, we had a walk, we had team building, we had games, music workshop, craft, all sorts of amazing stuff.

And one thing I've not heard so much about yet is that there was a children's program that went on in the morning while the grown-ups were having the talks here. And I'd really like to hear about that. I'm sure you would too.

So I'm very grateful to Jackie and her team who led those sessions yesterday. And I'd like to invite Jackie up to tell us what you guys got up to. Thanks, Jackie. Good morning.

[21:57] Good morning. Good morning. So, yesterday we had, oh, I think there was about 15 children and some young people here yesterday. And we did a few activities.

Have you got, there we go. So, first of all, we made some bread in the morning, which was very successful. I think, Sarah, we might be signing them up for the hospitality team to make some lunch next time you need some helpers.

But we did get some pictures of them eating the bread to show that it was edible at the end as well. And then after that, we played a quite loud, sorry about that, and exciting game of where in the church can you find these things?

So, what I've realized since I've been working here is there's lots of things in this building. Some of them I just haven't ever noticed. And some of them are things that tell us about this church and what this church has done in the past.

And the people who've been part of this church. And some of them are just things that I just haven't noticed. So, four of those things are up there now. So, you've got 30 seconds to talk to the person next to you and see if you know where all of those things are.

[22:59] Go. The one that's like an award if you can't see that one. Okay, your time is up. I'm afraid you're going to have to wait for that one. Okay, you're time is up. I'm afraid you're going to have to wait for that one. Okay, your time is up, I'm afraid.

If you don't know where they are, then your challenge is to try and find them. But luckily, you don't have to run around the building and find them now.

But you could have a look. I put the defibrillator up because I thought it was kind of important. I realized I'd never noticed it before until I started working here and then I got some training. But, yeah.

So there was a whole sheet of things. So if you're interested to try and find the others, you can find me and I will show you the photos. So then after that, we began to think about we are planning to make a time capsule to go under the floor somewhere in the new sanctuary, depending on how long it takes us to make the time capsule and how quickly the floor goes down.

So the idea is that in 100 years' time or whenever the floor is dug up again, hopefully it won't be for a long time, the people who are in the church then will be able to look back and see what the church was like in 2024.

[24:36] So one of the things that we're really celebrating is the number of different nationalities of people who make up our church membership. So yesterday we started a challenge to try and draw a flag for each of the countries that are represented in our church membership.

So we're going to carry on with that today. We'd also really like a greeting in as many different languages as possible to put into our time capsule.

So if you're in the coffee, in the hall for coffee afterwards, and you would be able to help us with that, because I can copy a flag, I'm not so good on the languages, that would be amazing.

And the other thing we're going to do is we're going to write a little bit about ourselves so that the people who find this time capsule in 100 years' time will know what the children were like in this church.

If you have any brilliant ideas of what should go into this time capsule, again, you can chat about it over coffee and come and tell me, and we'd like your help as well to put the time capsule together. [25:40] We are meeting all together in the Memorial Lounge today, so adventurers in particular, when you get collected, that's where you need to be, you'll be collected from, and Salt and Light, if you're not staying in the service, you're going to join us as well.

Great, thank you. Jackie, I'll let you get off, this one. Great, wonderful. Well, thank you for sharing that, and thank you for everyone, adult leaders and young leaders as well who were helping with that session.

That looks absolutely fantastic, and really excited about this idea of a time capsule, so do give that some thought. If you've got any good ideas about what could go in that time capsule, that's really exciting. So I'm going to pray for the children and the adults and the young people who are going to be helping them this morning.

So if you're in Salt and Light, and if you're not in the band, then you're going to be helping Jackie and the team with the children today, and we really appreciate that. So let's pray for them, and then we'll send them off.

Father God, we thank you so much for all that the children did yesterday and the fun they had. We thank you for what they have to do today. We thank you that we can celebrate in this church, that we have people from so many different nations.

[26:53] I think it's about 30 different nations are represented in this church as part of your family, and you call us to be a light to all the nations, and we see that happening right here, and we're thankful for that. We pray for our children and all those involved in the session this morning.

They'll have a wonderful time discovering more about how great you are, and that you'll draw them closer to each other and closer to you as well. We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. So children and young people who are helping them, and adults, we'll say goodbye to you now, and we'll see you at the end of the service.

■■ Let's come to the Lord with our prayers.

Let us pray. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we come to you today thankful for the privilege of being able to pray for others, and in the knowledge that we can boldly come before you and pray with confidence according to your will, knowing that you hear us.

Let us pray to the lives of those in darkness and fear of death.

[29:11] Forgive us, Lord, when in the midst of our own concerns we so easily forget about those who are suffering elsewhere.

Teach us your ways, merciful and compassionate Saviour. We pray for world leaders. We pray, Lord, for your wisdom, wisdom that goes beyond natural or political instincts, so that all leaders will govern with a better sense of justice and love.

May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We pray for Christian leaders.

Help them to serve you faithfully and exemplify your values. Make them bold in their faith. By your Holy Spirit, strengthen and encourage them as they live and work for you, as they lead and shepherd those in their care, drawing them into a deeper knowledge of your saving grace.

We particularly pray for those locally who are involved with charities reaching out to give support to those in need. The Growing Hope, who we heard about last Sunday.

[31:00] Wickham Homeless Connection. One Can Trust. Wickham Youth for Christ. Wickham Rent Deposit Scheme and others known to us.

We pray for Christians serving in these groups and organisations, that they will be an influence for good. Let them be salt and light, pointing others to you.

Deepen their love for you and for the people they are supporting, as well as those they are working alongside. Guard them from hypocrisy or from giving in to temptations, which could harm their witness to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray, Lord, for our own church and give thanks for the uplifting time we've had at our church weekend at home. Thank you for all those who've been involved in the organisation of the weekend and for all those who have contributed or led in any way.

We pray that as we each reflect on what we have seen and heard, sung and prayed, the activities we have enjoyed, the conversations we've had and all our interactions with others, that you would speak to each one of us, helping us to know that we have met with you, inspiring us to go deeper with you in our lives, showing us how to respond as living stones to serve you.

[32:30] We lift to you those who are being welcomed into membership today, here at Union, Daniel and Elisa, Graham and Jean.

Bless them as they grow in their knowledge of you. Use them, we pray, in your service. And we pray for all the families represented here today, that you would strengthen relationships for each of us with those closest to us, where there is hurt or brokenness.

We pray for healing and reconciliation. May our love for you help us to love and forgive others and make a difference as we witness to you in our families and communities.

Lord, we pray for those who are ill now and those struggling with long-term conditions. Especially, we pray, for those in our own fellowship, Beryl, Ryan, Elizabeth, and others known to us who are suffering at this time.

Let's name them in our hearts in a moment of quiet. Amen. In Jesus' name, we ask for healing.

[33:54] Be with all who are struggling with their mental health. In Jesus' name, we ask for relief from anxiety and darkness. Bring your peace that passes understanding to guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

and we pray especially today for the family and friends of our dear brother Don, who died this week. We give thanks for Don's life of service, of faithful service, for his love for you and the certainty of eternal life with you.

We pray that you will bring comfort and hope to Françoise and their children and grandchildren and Don's wider family and friends as they grieve. May they each know your presence with them, bringing strength, peace, and the joy of your salvation.

Pour out your healing balm, Lord, on all who are grieving and all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit. Soothe their wounds and bring restoration.

Reveal your love and grace, filling their hearts with hope and joy. And use us, we pray, as instruments of your healing, offering comfort, compassion, and support.

[35:21] May your divine healing power touch their lives and bring wholeness. Lord Jesus, there are so many needs, but you are more than enough for every need.

Your name is powerful and your power is great. So it's in your name that we pray. Amen. Amen. The reading is Titus, chapter 3.

Remind the people 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 true humility towards all men.

At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that having been justified, by his grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life.

[37:04] This is a trustworthy saying, and 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. But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

Warn a divisive person once, then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful.

He is self-condemned. As soon as I send Artemis or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there.

Do everything you can to help Asenus, the lawyer, and Apollos on their way, and see that they have everything they need. Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.

[38:10] Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Thank you so much, Rachel, for bringing us that reading.

I'd like to welcome John now. If you can come and join me here, John. Now, you did introduce yourself yesterday. I'm aware that there's a number of people here who weren't with us yesterday. So could you just do a quick recap and just give a brief introduction and tell us a little bit about yourself?

Thank you. So I'm John. I'm married to Alison. We have two daughters, Nicola and Anna. Nicola lives in Woking and Anna in Cardiff. They're both grown up. And we live just on the edge of the New Forest, where Southampton kind of hits the New Forest is our home.

We were serving for 18 years at a Bud Bar church in the middle of Southampton until summer 2022. And since then, I had a year of study and then been working with Catalyst, leading the course that Andrew attends each month, which we love, and we lead that together.

And Alison is also a teacher of English language to internationals, to refugees and asylum seekers and so on through City College in Southampton. Is that about right?

[39:24] That's wonderful. Perfect. Thank you. I'd like to pray for you before you share with us on Titus chapter 3. Thank you so much. Let's pray for John. Father God, yeah, just thank you so much for bringing John and Alison to us for this weekend and for the way they've been serving us.

And thank you for the ministry that you've called them to through Catalyst and through the church where they're serving in Southampton and through Alison's teaching of English as a foreign language.

And I thank you for the gifts that you've given them. And I just want to pray for John now as he shares with us from your word. We thank you for your word and I pray that you would speak through him, that it would have an impact on us and that we would respond in obedience to what you have to say to us through your word and through John today.

I pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you, Andy. Thank you. Well, thank you very much. It has been great to be here as part of this weekend. Alison and I have both enjoyed it thoroughly and you've given us a wonderful welcome and made us feel very at home.

So thank you and a great privilege to come and share God's word with you and just to get a sense of the lovely, inclusive, diverse community that you are here at Union Baptist.

[40:37] That's been a real joy. As you've already picked up, we're looking at this book of Titus, this book in the New Testament, which began its life as a letter from the Apostle Paul, one of the founding early leaders of the church, to his friend and colleague Titus, who was looking after some churches on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean.

So that's what we've been doing and we're coming to our final study in Titus this morning. But let me begin with a confession that up until just a few years ago, I have to admit, Titus was not a book that was very high on my list of kind of favoured books.

It had slightly missed my radar. I read it a few times, of course, but preached on it very little and honestly, when I had preached on it, it hadn't really quite kind of caught fire for me.

But that's really changed in the last few years and there's a reason for that. I've been thinking and studying quite a lot about church and mission and obviously very interested in the Apostle Paul and his vision of mission.

But when you read up on all the learning things that have been written about Paul and mission, they always focus on Paul the missionary and what he actually did himself.

[42:03] Now that's good because Paul was around planting churches and that's a wonderful thing to do. We love to see churches planted because the Church of Jesus is the hope of the world.

It's great when there are live churches established. That's a wonderful thing. But I guess as someone who's been a pastor over the years, I'm not interested just in how churches get planted.

I'm interested in what Paul thought their role in mission would be for the years after they were planted. So what's the idea? You know, a church gets planted, it's all fizz bang, exciting, lots of amazing things happen, and then the church is planted and settles down and it sort of becomes, well, just a sort of small, dull, slightly uninteresting, safe, little religious social club and kind of channels its way to heaven after that.

Was that what Paul expected for these churches that he was planting? Because if we're honest, that is too often how many churches do end up a little bit turned in on themselves, not really understanding their place in mission and perhaps just a little bit self-absorbed and inward.

But as you read Paul's letter to Titus, you pick up a totally different vision for what the church is to be, a radically different story. Now, we don't actually know too much about how the churches in Crete got started.

[43:33] Probably Paul was involved, but we don't know for sure. But as we saw in chapter one, Titus was left there to kind of finish the job of establishing these churches to make sure that they were strong and healthy.

What then did that strong and healthy church look like? Well, as we've gone through, we've begun to see in chapter one, Paul wanted it to be a faithful church sticking firmly to the good news of the gospel so that they could speak that good news to the community faithfully, not getting distracted with false teaching.

And then we saw in chapter two that it wasn't just about the words they spoke, it was about the quality of their life as well. He wanted it to be a distinctive church making an impact in the community by making the gospel attractive through the way that they lived, through holy living. So a faithful church speaking to the community, a distinctive church making an impact in the community. But as we get into chapter three, we see that he also wanted it to be a serving church doing good for the community.

Faithful speaking to the community, distinctive making an impact in the community, serving church, working for the community.

[44:56] To quote Tim Keller, the American pastor who died last year, the church is meant to be pressing so much value into its community that people say, look, I'm not sure I believe what you believe, but frankly, I just couldn't imagine this place without you.

the church for the community. So I wonder, what does it look like for the church to be for its community? What would it look like for Union Baptist Church to be a church for High Wiccan? Well, from what I picked up over this weekend, in many ways, I think that vision is already very much in place. But let's see how Paul can help us go a bit further with it through Titus chapter three. He begins in verses one and two with talking about the church doing good for our community. Verse one, remind the people 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 always to be gentle towards everyone.

Now, let's not get off course here. We have a message of good news in Jesus Christ, how he died for our sins not to make us religious but to bring us home to God so that we can live forever in relationship with him.

[46:22] A wonderful message of good news. And that message is so important that we've seen Paul's emphasis here that the church mustn't get distracted from it through false teaching or division or anything else.

He writes message, he writes letters like this one to Titus to make sure they stay focused firmly on that message. They must be faithful. And a message has to be spoken.

That's the nature of a message, isn't it? It has to be spoken. It has to be communicated so that people can hear it and come to know God through our Lord Jesus and be saved.

It's important we speak the message and it's important that we do that with clarity and that we make the case for the message to show its reasonableness and its credibility.

That's all really, really important. But the message needs to be seen as well as heard. It must be both and. It has to be seen and heard.

[47:23] It has to be, if you like, clothed in transformed lives which make it attractive or which draw its attractiveness out and make it

visible.

And that happens both by how individuals live as the church in the community and how the church serves for the community.

Doing good in the community as we've seen here. In our years in Southampton, as I kind of indicated, we were very slow learners on this. I think you've gone further and faster.

But we gradually began to realise that we needed to get stuck in. We needed to get our clean churchy hands dirty for Jesus. So we began a breakfast club for homeless people.

We developed a community for older people that was accessible to some of the sheltered housing projects near the church building. We worked with Christians Against Poverty to help people in debt.

[48:21] Alison led some language work for refugees and asylum seekers and other international friends. We were involved with getting emergency food to struggling families and schools during the pandemic but since then as well in food banks.

So those were some of the ways we learned to serve our community. But it isn't just about those kinds of organised! organised projects! It can just be about the sense of community that we build in and around our church building as a place where people are welcome.

You seem to me to do that really well as a church. It's a great strength to be building on. But it's also about making a difference right where we are all across the town and all across the area.

It's about the way that we treat our neighbours, the way we look out for neighbours who might be in need. Perhaps, especially if you've got somebody else in the church living nearby you or in the same workplace as you, the way you come together to serve that little part of the community that you're in, a wonderful way to serve the community.

And then in our day-to-day work it's about the quality of the work we do, the way we serve in our jobs, the way we treat people, our clients, our colleagues, our stakeholders.

[49:39] It's about making a difference right where we are. A little aside on that, I'm convinced that there's lots of mission that doesn't happen because we think we're meant to do it solo.

And most of us, me included, we're not brave enough to do it solo. And so it just doesn't happen. If God has put you somewhere in a workplace or in the community, look for another believer there.

Get to know them, pray with them, make common cause with them so that together you reach out. Because not only does that help us overcome our fears, it also gives us a chance to show people that we are disciples of Jesus by our love for one another.

Isn't that what the Lord Jesus said? By this will all people know that you're my disciples, that you love one another. Well, if we only ever do our mission solo, one-on-one, we never give the opportunity to show that.

So let's work together, serving our community. And we also need to recognise that poverty, because in many ways this is about addressing poverty and need, poverty doesn't always take the same form.

[50:50] There are lots of different kinds of poverty. Yesterday we looked at this idea of shalom, what God is working to restore as part of his mission in the world, and how he wants to bring back together the relationships which sin broke right at the beginning.

He wants to bring back that relationship between us and God, between us and other people, us and creation, us and ourselves. All of those relationships are broken by sin.

You can see it in Genesis chapter 3 as clearly as ever. And therefore, the shalom to which we are working is the restoration of all of these relationships.

Or to see it in terms of poverty, there's spiritual poverty, people need relationship with God. There's social poverty, people need relationship with each other. There's material poverty, people need a fair share of the resources of creation.

And there's emotional or psychological poverty, people need to be at peace with themselves. All four are important and all of these poverty need to be addressed.

[51:57] And as a church with wonderful diversity and a great tradition of welcome and including people, you've got a wonderful opportunity to address that relational and to a degree emotional poverty as well as the

material poverty around you.

Grasp those opportunities and look for ways to express the wholeness of this shalom, caring for whole people, their material needs, their spiritual needs, their emotional needs and their social needs.

It can be a wonderfully distinctive way of serving our communities. And that's very much what Paul is calling for here. He wants us to be the church for the community, not just the church in the community.

Leslie Newbigin, whose work I've been studying quite a bit recently, notes that in the New Testament, almost whenever there's a reference to the church or to the local church, it comes with two kind of things attached.

It's always the church of God or the church in Jesus Christ. So that's the vertical relationship. And then almost always it's the church of Christ in Colossae, Ephesus, Corinth, whatever.

[53:10] Those are the two realities. The vertical one with the church of God in Jesus Christ and then the horizontal one with the church in the community. And both of those matter.

Both of them need to be invested into so that we become the church for those communities, serving them in the name of Christ. What does that look like?

Well, verse one, it means respecting the authorities. It's what it says, isn't it? Remind the people to be subject to the rulers and authorities, to be obedient and ready to do whatever is good.

Respecting the authorities, the local MPs, the councillors, the NHS, the police. Let us not be the only, let us not be the kind of people that only ever get in touch with the authorities to complain. You know, it can be a pretty miserable job being a public servant. And if the only thing Christians ever do is to complain, and especially to complain about protecting their own rights, what message do you think that gives to those in authority?

[54:12] Now, let's be those who are not just default cynical towards those authority, but pay respect, even encouragement and appreciation where we're able to, whether that's the MPs, the councillors, the police, the NHS, or whoever, being respectful so that even if they are against us, and let's not assume that they always are, but even if they are, they couldn't imagine life in this community without us.

That's the challenge, isn't it? Because we're the church for the community, respecting the community. But it's not just passive, it's proactive. It says be ready or be eager, we had back in chapter 2, verse 14, to do whatever is good, to serve where the needs are, to make your community a better place in some way, or if you have a job, to make your workplace a better place for people to work in, doing good for the community.

And, verse 2, it means treating people well, slandering no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle towards everyone.

Do you think those are the words that are most associated with Christians in public life today, Christians in the workplace today? Are those the words that would attach to you on your street, in your community, in the place where you work?

Is that what they would say? They don't slander anyone. They're peaceable and considerate.

They'll be the first to do the washing up in the kitchen at work when nobody else has done it.

[55:45] They're peaceable, they're considerate, always gentle towards everyone. They're not the ones stirring trouble. They're the ones that get alongside those who are struggling and support them. This is what it is to do good for our communities.

But we need to be careful about how we do this because too often when we get a vision for doing good for our communities, which is a good vision to have, we can end up coming across with the wrong spirits as people with a little bit of a saviour complex, people who think we're better than others who are therefore in a position to help others and it starts to kind of smell wrong if you get what I mean.

And I love the way that Paul then guards against that as he gets to the second section in verses 3 to 8 which I've summarised as being filled with grace in our community.

Filled with grace. The point is that if we really get the message of grace, it'll rescue us from a saviour complex.

It will rescue us from a superior judgmental attitude as we serve our community. Let me explain why. Verse 3, if you read in some of the other translations, there's an extra word which the NIV misses out.

[57:07] It's a linking word. It's the word for or because. And it's sometimes lost in translation as I say. But it tells us that what Paul is about to say about the message of grace is linked to what he has just said in verses 1 and 2 about being the church for the community and serving the community.

What Paul is saying is look, as you do that, as you serve the community, as you try and make it a better place to live and to work and so on, you must never forget, verse 3, that at one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of pleasures and passions.

We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. Do you get what he's saying? He's saying, look, we didn't respect authority.

No, we were disobedient. We didn't do good. No, we were slaves of worldly desires. We didn't treat people well. No, we envied and hated each other. That's what we were like.

What changed us? Is it that we're really better than anybody else? No. What changed us? God changed us. Verse 4, but when the kindness and love of God, our Saviour, appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

[58:34] It was all God. It was all the gospel and when you know that, you can't be stuck up and superior. You can only be thankful and humble and filled with grace and gentle with other people because that's how God has been towards you and towards me.

Filled with grace in our communities. But of course, verses 3 to 8 give us some wonderful, rich food just to chew on for a few minutes. So let's just walk through them briefly, as briefly as I can.

Paul wants us to remember who we were, verse 3, and then to remember who saved us, verses 4 and 5, that God sent his son Jesus to save us.

It's what he did that counts, not what we do. And knowing that humbles us and lifts us up. But there's even more than that. Paul wants us to remember the basis on which we were saved.

What was it? He saved us not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

It's all down to the mercy of God that we find salvation.

[59:46] It's nothing to do with anything that we earn or deserve. God saved us by forgiving us through the cross where Jesus took the punishment we deserved for all the mistakes we've made so that we could live free from that.

Free to know God. Mercy. That's the basis on which we're saved. And it's great news because it means we can be confident in it. God is rich in mercy and he has enough of it for me and for you. Isn't that wonderful? If it depended on me I'd live the whole of my life insecure because I'd never know if I'd lived up to the standard. In fact, I would deep down know that I never could live up to the standard.

But because it's on the basis of mercy, the mercy of a God who is rich in mercy, we can live in confident joy because that mercy is enough to save us, enough for all of our failures.

But there's more here. Remember the means by which he saved us. Middle of verse 5. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

[60:56] Do you see how the whole Trinity is working together here to save us? God the Father saved us, verse 5. He did it by the renewing work of the Spirit. Middle of verse 5.

Who was poured out on us through the work of Jesus, his Son. Verse 6. Can you see the great divine conspiracy? The Father coming towards us in unquenchable love.

Coming towards us in his Son in unfathomable grace so as to remake and renew our lives by the Spirit in unstoppable power. Wonderful.

The whole Trinity conspiring together to save us and make us new. The key phrase there is the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit and probably the best way to understand that is that Paul can speak of salvation in different ways.

He can speak of it as a past thing. He saved us, verse 5. But he can also speak of it as a continuing thing. He is continuing to save us in the sense that he is continuing to transform and renew us by the Spirit.

[62:02] And he can speak of it as a future thing. He's going to save us when Christ returns and makes everything new and we join him in that new creation to reign with him. But the focus here is on the process.

First, the Holy Spirit gives us a new birth. Our lives begin all over again. That's the past aspect when we put our trust in Jesus and our sins are forgiven. We were saved.

But the Spirit keeps working on us. He isn't just to do with making us a Christian in the first place.

He's to do with transforming us into the image of Christ, renewing our lives from the inside out.

We are being saved. But then verse 7, the process continues, that it's heading somewhere so that, verse 7, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

That's the purpose for which he saved us, to share his life and reign in the new creation. Just stand back from this for a moment. It's wonderful.

[63:06] Get hold of it. We were disobedient, doing evil, not good, treating people badly, not with gentleness. That's our natural condition. But through Jesus, God stepped into our lives to put us right with himself.

He justified us. He's transforming our lives by the Spirit so that now we live with him and we know we will live with him forever in that perfected kingdom where justice and peace and righteousness reign.

And then Paul adds at the end, this is a trustworthy saying, verse 8. In other words, this isn't just a nice little bit of kind of theology to kind of stretch our heads. No, this is practical.

You can stake everything on this truth, he's saying, and it won't let you down. A trustworthy saying, God is rich in mercy. His mercy is enough to transform your life and transform your eternal destiny.

This is one to enjoy, isn't it? You know, life might be quite hard. It is for many of us, struggling with ongoing issues in our lives, in our families, perhaps concerned about the cost of living, feeling the strain in our mental health, our relationships, our finances.

[64:19] We're not sure what the future holds. Life can be hard. There are lots of mysteries that we don't know the answer to. But we do know this.

We do know that we've been saved by Jesus. We do know that the Spirit is working in us to change us into his likeness. We do know that glory awaits us in eternity. It's a trustworthy saying.

You can stake everything on it. Hallelujah. How can we know this is true for us? Well, we're back to where we started. Paul wants us to remember also the evidence that he has saved us.

Verse 8, a trustworthy saying, and I want you to stress these things so that those who trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. We're back to that same core theme of the chapter. Doing good, serving the community, making the gospel attractive.

[65:21] That's the evidence of our salvation. Transform living that goes on to transform other people. And notice it's for the benefit of everyone. End of verse 8, these things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

They don't just stay in the church. They overflow into High Wycombe, into the community. And that's really the heart and the climax of Titus.

The gospel is true. It's wonderful, life-changing, liberating news. And it depends on what Jesus did for us, not on what we do for him.

But when we let it do its work in us, it changes us. And when it changes us, people see the change. And it makes the gospel attractive and draws people to Jesus as well.

Of course, our enemy will do everything he can to distract us from that. So in verses 9 to 15, I'm only going to give you the headings. There's a warning about staying on track, keeping united, verses 9 to 11, keeping caring, verses 12 and 13, staying focused, verse 14.

[66:34] Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good. Do you kind of think Paul's emphasising something here? Comes back again in order to provide for urgent needs and not to live unproductive lives.

Stay on track. Well, it has been such a joy to serve you at Union Baptist over this weekend. And I want to stress all this stuff I'm sharing is intended not to load you with pressure, but to encourage you in what I sense you are already in very large measure doing, but also to encourage you to be open to the Holy Spirit's prompts as to where there might be further steps he's wanting you to take. But also to say that God's heart for his church, God's heart for this church, is wonderful and expansive. It's to be a faithful church because you have a message to speak to this community. A distinctive church because you have a calling to live differently in this community in a way that makes the gospel attractive. And a serving church working for this community with the kindness and grace of Jesus overflowing through you to the least, the last, and the lost.

Stay united, stay kind, stay focused, stay on track, do good in High Wycombe. Not to earn brownie points with God, no, do good to others because God has done good to you.

[68:16] Do good to them because that's what God's grace teaches you, as we saw in chapter 2. Do good to the community, not to make them think well of you, but to make the gospel of Jesus attractive.

because the people of High Wycombe and all its surrounding villages, they need desperately to hear the good news of the gospel and to see it lived in a way that we love and serve.

Let's just take a moment of reflection and prayer before I hand back to the band to lead us in worship. And maybe is that challenge to be the church in the community just rests in your heart. Maybe you want to ask the Holy Spirit to nudge and prompt you to birth new dreams and visions within you as to what that might mean.

think about your voice. Think about where you live.

[69:35] What will it mean to serve that little neighborhood? Think of where you work. work. What will it mean to make it a better place to work day to day for your colleagues and those you serve?

Think of your network of relationships, the friends you have, the people you do life next to. What does it mean to serve in that community?

Lord Jesus, you have been so, so abundantly kind to us. You've reached out to us with such extraordinary mercy and grace.

We're so deeply grateful. We pray that in these moments you will birth in our hearts a new sense of commission and call and a new vision for what it will mean for us to live as the church for this community of High Wycombe.

We pray that you will continue to build strongly on all that is there and that you will give new steps forward so that the good news of Jesus may be seen and heard so clearly.

[70:55] For the sake of his glory we pray. Amen. God created one the author of salvation was the Lord of space and time and fashion was to his design the one who made your host to live on the stars like chandeliers covered every grain of sand he is king forever he is king forever he is king forevermore for our fortress and our strength the rock on which we can defend much less in his majesty his power and authority unshaken by the scenes of man never changing great

I am kingdom skies and kingdoms fall he is faithful to it all found him king forever found him forever found him she forever more!

! to God immortal flesh forsaken by the traitor's kiss man the curse of sin and sanctuary! did pierce the lowly grits of peace lifted by the sinless man crucified by the spotless lamb buried by the sons man he was rescued by the father's hands great and king forever great and king forever great and king forever more king here is you o god of grace we crown you with the highest grace when child and saints adore!

your holy holy holy Lord what joy of everlasting life all is love and faith inside justice flows and praise is right at the name of jesus christ king of things forever king of things forever king of things forever more amen do please sit down before we come to communion we're going to do something which I'm very excited to do which is to welcome some people into membership so at this point

[75:57] I'd like to welcome Graham and Jean and Daniel and Elisa if they could please come and join me upon the platform so that we can introduce you and welcome you as members today now just as they come up a covenantal relationship where we commit each other to pray and serve and encourage one another in carrying out God's mission that we've been

hearing about do please kind of it's a bit cramped here but hopefully you can find a space on here move along there there we go that's wonderful so it's about serving together and it's about taking part in making decisions that we make together as a church seeking God's will for what here in High Wycombe so it's great to have Jean and Graham who are transferring from Totteridge Baptist Church and Totteridge Baptist Church have given them a really warm commendation so it's with pleasure that we receive you into membership here that's wonderful and also

Daniel and Elisa who have moved in the last few years from Brazil and they've been here a few years and I think it's fair to say you sense God's prompting to make Union Baptist church your spiritual home now and that's wonderful we're so delighted you've decided to do that we look forward to serving together with all of you in this so as we do this we're just going to ask you some very simple questions and the questions will come up on the screen and this is just to check that you are believers who've trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour so the questions are going to come up on the screen now no they're not okay so I'm going to I'm going to read the questions and the answer to the first two questions are I do so do you believe in one God Father Son and Holy Spirit your creator and redeemer and the sustainer of all things wonderful do you believe that God has led you to share in the worship life and witness of this local congregation and the next question the answer is I will if you agree with this will you share with us the gifts that God has given you that together we may serve

God in our local community and in the wider world wonderful now just to explain a bit more about what membership is about as Baptists we convene together as a community of the disciples of Jesus Christ baptized into his name we share the joys and responsibilities of fellowship we gather for worship to discern the mind of Christ and together we seek the kingdom of God through prayer witness and service and in the power of the Holy Spirit we seek to build one another up in love so with that in mind I'm going to ask you another question and the answer to this again is I will so will you share with us in the common life and service will you walk together with us before God in ways that are known and yet to be made known wonderful now I have a question to all of us here who are church members so if you are a member of Union Baptist Church if I could ask you to stand briefly for the next question and this is about whether you welcome them and the answer I'm I'm expecting to hear from the fellowship of this worshipping community great and there's another question and the answer to this question is we will

God has given us the gift of Elisa Daniel Jean and Graham and through them has given us gifts of ministry in the life and witness of this congregation will you support them in Christian service and in the responsibilities of church membership we will and another question the answer is also we will you pray for Jean and Graham Elisa and Daniel and encourage them through hospitality friendship and prayer that's great to hear thank you so much you can sit down it's wonderful to welcome you as members and we're going to be sharing in communion which is part of the hospitality that we share as members of God's family together hospitality is more than that and it involves all members of the church and it normally involves food or at least a cup of tea or coffee so just a reminder and we've got just a little there's a certificate in here and there's a verse on the back of the certificate for each one of you which you can look at later and this is something which

I believe God wants to say to you at this time to encourage you so Daniel that's for you and Elisa that's for you shake your hands that's and to Graham that's for you and Jean absolutely welcome to them okay and I'd just like to say a prayer for our new members and maybe just as a sign that you're right behind you you might just like to hold up your hands towards them and let's just pray for God's blessing on them so Father God we thank you so much for our brothers and sisters Daniel and Elisa and Graham and Jean and we thank you that you have led them to this place to this point of wanting to make Union Baptist Church their spiritual home where they worship you where they serve you and I thank you for their willingness to join with us with the diverse community that we have here to encourage each other but to serve our local community and to seek your will for how you would use us and

[81:51] I pray that you would bless us enable us to be a blessing to them and I pray that you would fill them with your Holy Spirit and do great things through them we pray this in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Thank you so much Do please go and take your seats either staircases So I'll get

out of the way There we go wonderful so we're now going to come to communion and I'm just going to ask those deacons or elders who are helping me serve communion if you could come and join me here now and take a seat that would be wonderful So as we come to prepare to share this special meal together I just want to remind each other what we're what we're doing here so I'm going to read from a passage that Paul wrote that talks about this from 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and from verse 23

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread and when he'd given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me in the same way after supper he took the cup saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes So then whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves So with that in mind I'd just like to take a small amount of time just to examine ourselves and And I'm just going to pray a prayer to to confess to God the ways that we've let him down before we come to share this meal in which we're reminded of God's forgiveness for us. So let's pray

Lord we Look at our own lives as we as we come to this communion table and we realize that we we don't deserve The grace the mercy the welcome and the kindness that you've shown us We're sorry that we've been disobedient We've not been gentle. We've often spoken badly of other people We've often been selfish and inconsiderate We've not been ready to do the good that you call us to do We've not said yes to the things that please you and we've not said no to the things that hurt you Please forgive us Lord We thank you for the assurance of forgiveness we have Because you died for our sins and you rose again You have defeated the power of sin and evil that we were enslaved to You've set us free and we're so thankful for what you've done for us Amen So this meal is a celebration of the kindness and goodness that God has shown to us Through Jesus our Savior we've been put right with God through Jesus

Not because of the righteous things that we've that we've done ourselves as we've been reminded in Titus And we celebrate the love That's what this meal is about celebrating that God has shown us demonstrated his love to us in sending his son To make the sacrifice for our sins paying the penalty that should have been ours to pay What we'll do in a moment is we'll pass around Plates of bread and we can each take a piece of bread as we were and eat it as we receive it Reminding ourselves that Jesus died for each one of us individuals He died for us He knows us He loves us as individuals As the plate comes around there's one smaller dish on each plate that's got gluten-free bread So do please take that one if you need that one Afterwards we'll pass around these trays which have little cups of non-alcoholic wine When you receive the cup I'd ask you just to hold on to it and we'll wait until everybody's been served And then we'll drink together as a reminder that we're all saved into one new family, God's family

Because we can all be called his children Sharing in what we're doing here at Holy Communion is something that we come to as individuals Who've decided to follow Jesus as our Lord and Saviour Now if that's something that you're not sure that you're there yet or you don't feel ready for yet Then feel free just please to let the trays pass you by But just take this time to watch and observe and listen to what God might be saying to you through this So let me just say a prayer to say thanks to God for this meal Father we thank you That your kindness and love has appeared to us In Jesus your son who lived as one of us but without sin And he was condemned to death even though he was totally innocent We thank you that he did that for us So that we can be set free from being slaves to our sin We thank you that by your death you wash us clean on the inside And by your spirit you enable us to have the life of Jesus within us

[87:14] Thank you that by your generosity you have made us heirs So we can share the life That only your son deserves But we can receive that now and with you in eternity So we thank you for this meal These simple elements of bread and wine which point us to you And help us to experience something so profound about what you've done for us We thank you for these reminders of Jesus' body and his blood Given for each one

of us Amen So we remember that Jesus took the bread And as he broke it he said This is my body which is for you Do this in remembrance of me And it was made it Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[90:44] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[93:14] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[95:44] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[98:44] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[101:14] Thank you.

Amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[103:44] Thank you.

So, I would ask, Thank you, Jackie, Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[107:14] We pause for a moment.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

We'll see you downstairs for coffee, and I'd love to pray with anyone who... Sorry. Alison. Am I allowed to say something? Of course you are. Yes, yes, I'm sorry. Thank you. No, no, no, it's fine. Just one little thing. When I came in, I couldn't help noticing this house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

[109:29] And you know that the nations are on my heart. And I loved it today, hearing that 30 nations are part of this church. And I loved it that when you were welcoming people into membership, you hugged them.

Because the nations can shape this church. And sometimes we're very British, and we need to allow the contribution from other nations to shape us and change us.

And don't be afraid of that. People from other nations have something beautiful to offer, and that can be part of you growing as a church. So I'd say, love one another well, and don't be too British about it.

Amen. You get a hug for that. Thank you. Thank you so much. Bless you. Thank you. Thank you.  
Thank you so much. Thanks, everyone.  
Thank you.  
[111:28] Thank you.