

Together on Mission session 2

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[0:00] as to exactly how the churches in Crete were planted or when they were planted. Often when you read the letters of Paul, you can go back to the book of Acts and put the two together and it all kind of makes sense.

But we don't have that with Crete, so we don't really know exactly how or when they were planted. Probably they were planted by Paul, although there's some evidence that right from the beginning, in Acts chapter 2, when the day of Pentecost dawns and there are people gathered from all over the Mediterranean world in Jerusalem and they hear the good news, that included some Jewish people from Crete.

So it may be that to some extent the churches were sort of beginning to get established even before the Apostle Paul visited. That's speculation, we don't know.

But what we do know is that Paul didn't regard the task as complete or as finished. And he had left Titus there to kind of finish the job.

And that involved appointing leaders. Shout out to 1 verse 5. The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished. Literally straighten out what was left unfinished, a mixed kind of metaphor.

[1:14] And appoint elders in every town as I directed you. Now that's really important. Because what it tells us is that for Paul, a church wasn't thoroughly planted and established until it had godly elders to lead it and to look after it.

That tells us that churches are meant to be overseen and led. That's part of God's plan for his church.

And in a culture that is increasingly suspicious of leadership, we need to be willing to stand against that tide and say, no, we welcome being led and we honour those who lead us.

That was part of Paul's understanding of what it meant to plant the church. And he regarded it as particularly important because he needed leaders who would protect the church from false teaching.

If you just look at the sort of, the paragraph there, verse 5 introduces the call to appoint these elders. And then that comes to a close in verse 9.

[2:27] But then verse 10 begins with that word for, an explanatory linking kind of word. So he's saying, appoint elders, verses 5 to 9, because, verse 10, there are many rebellious people full of meaningless talk and deception who've got to be silenced because they're disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach.

You see the connection? Appoint godly elders who are grounded in the truth of the gospel in order to protect the church from the false teaching that surrounds you there in Crete.

So what do these kind of gospel leaders look like? Well, the emphasis here is very much not on their education or on their degrees, but on their character and their example.

Verse 6, they are to be blameless or above reproach, which doesn't mean sinless. I have never met a sinless elder in all my life and I've never been one.

There aren't any, okay? Blameless is not the same thing as sinless. To be blameless, as Paul goes on to explain, is about having their home life in order.

[3:35] If they're married, they're faithful in their marriage and they invest into their marriage. If they have children, they care for their children. They give them time and they give them money.

Verse 7 means that they are sensitive to how they use their power and influence. Verse 7, since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless, i.e. not overbearing, not pretended, not given to drunkenness, not violence, not pursuing, it's not the same thing.

Leadership in the Bible isn't about having the right to get your own way. It isn't primarily a power thing.

The God lives in the church, how they use it. He includes the people. They're not to be slaves of blessedly desires, but governed by those life-giving desires of love for what is good.

Rather, he must be responsible. One who loves what is good is self-controlled, upright, holy, and christian. These kind of elders, leaders, have their homes open to bless others.

[4:50] They are hospitable. They're underrated. Practically. A leader with an open home, whose life can be seen as they can see it in their own way.

And they're not only a nation. Does Paul mean in verse 6 that the children have to be believers? On the surface, that's what it says, isn't it?

A man whose children believe, as they are open to the child, a little wild and a little bit. But the word there keeps believing, people who are believers, could equally mean who are faithful.

And you could see the second half of verse 6 is explaining what it means to them to be faithful, i.e. they're not open to the child of being wise and a little bit.

I think we often have to say that, particularly as children growing for 28 years, hopefully the courage of the brethren can make their own way. Even the gods who today have found peace for their children to share their faith.

[5:53] And we need to kind of recognize that, to be where the leader is. But I think what we do have to say is here that you can't be a leader and leader in the family.

Either by heart or by heart. Even if the children don't share your faith as they grow older. Let's pray that they do. Let's give them every opportunity to make the faith their own.

But even if they don't, they're still with respect. They're still with respect. So that they can be a leader. So there's the emphasis.

Character, an example. This is really what leadership is about in the churches. Because the knowledge of the truth leads to godliness. That's the whole point, isn't it?

So if these leaders know the truth of the gospel truly, it will be reflected in the godliness of power. That is, character and example.

[6:50] But what about the role of these leaders? Well, Paul uses two different words here. He uses the word elder. This probably refers to their kind of maturity.

Their seniority. That enables them to care for the flock as shepherds. And then he also uses the word overseer. Episcopos.

Which probably stresses their responsibility. To take responsibility for the church. To lead, to guard, and protect. So one is primarily exemplary and pastoral.

And the other is more about leadership and protection, perhaps. But they're the same people. At least in Titus here. And how do they do that?

How do they protect and lead and grow the church? Verse 9. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it's been taught. So that he can encourage others by sound doctrine.

[7:45] And refute those who oppose it. That doesn't mean that all elders have to be preachers. But it does mean that they can't be theologically all over the place. They need to be deeply grounded in the gospel.

That trustworthy message. So they can encourage and instruct others around their dinner table, perhaps, in that message. And stand robustly against those who oppose it.

Let's just pause there for a moment. That's lots of words, isn't it? Lots to take on board. I'm conscious in the room here. There will be some of us who are leaders. And if that's you, and it doesn't necessarily mean as an elder.

It may be you're leading in the children's work or the youth work or the homeless work that's going on here. It could be lots of different ways. But for those of us that are leaders, here's the challenge. Pay attention to character and to home life.

Don't allow them to be neglected. Don't see them as nice to house. They are the bedrock of ministry. Stay grounded in the scriptures.

[8:50] Because to be grounded in the truth of the gospel is essential to this task. And then do everything you can to protect the church from distraction and division.

Don't mess around, you know. Don't play games to kind of divide the church on this issue or this issue or to set people against another.

Don't play those games. You have a power entrusted to you as a leader which you must use with the utmost care. Don't mess around. Don't play games. Protect the church from distraction and division.

Don't do anything that will weaken the ability and the unity of the church to fulfill the mission of God. But then there are plenty of us here that are not leaders as well.

So is this all irrelevant for us? Well, I don't think it is irrelevant for us. Because there's an implicit challenge here, isn't there? If churches need to be led, if that's part of God's intention, then actually for those of us who are led, we have a responsibility to value those leaders.

[9:57] Even though they're not perfect, even though they'll sometimes make mistakes, but we still need to value them. And when they do make mistakes, that doesn't mean that we can write them off and destroy them.

It means we encourage them to find a new path and to move forward again. And that word encouragement, it's so important. Can I just ask you, as an individual, just think for yourself, when did you last say something deliberately to encourage one of the elders in the church here?

Really ask yourself that question. Has it been within the last couple of weeks? Because if it hasn't, there's something not right. You know, don't think that somebody else will do it.

To be honest, my experience is somebody else probably won't have done it. So encourage your leaders. Leaders need encouragement. They need the respect and support of the people.

And just listen to that. It doesn't mean you have to agree with everything that they decide. It doesn't mean you have to think they're perfect because they're not. But don't you see it?

[11:06] It's the easiest thing in the world in our picture. Just to be cynical. And to make a smile coming. And have the kind of coffee down there that you can't ever do.

It doesn't mean you have to. It isn't godly. It doesn't help. Instead, when you have the input to the people, prayer to your leaders.

Prayer to their families. Prayer to your listeners. Prayer to your listeners. Because God believes in you. Grounded in the gospel, growing gospel leaders, finally guarding the gospel in verses 10 to 16. Because as we've seen, there are lots of people who want to do exactly the opposite. Verse 10 and 11, rebellious people, full of meaningless talk. They must be silenced because they're disrupting the whole household by teaching things they ought not to teach.

Now, I'm not going to go into the detail of this passage here. If you want to ask me about it over coffee, feel free to do that. We don't know exactly what the court is doing.

[12:15] There's an influence in the church. We can kind of do our best to put it together. But just in a sentence, as far as I can read, what we've got is people that are, on the one hand, very committed to religion and religion.

And on the other hand, very relaxed in their religion and religion. And they use the one to justify the other.

Okay? Do your religious stuff. Have your obscure interpretation of the Jewish scripture. Follow your ritualistic rules of religion. And then that will cut you a little bit of slack.

Because the other is much easier to live in. Prince is culture of the lie and the morality if you go down that path. Do the religion bit. That gets God off your back. And the church is not good.

You grace. That's the truth. That seems to be the heart of what's going on. And of course, with all that emphasis on religious ritual, there is an undermining of grace.

[13:22] And then in the lack of holiness of both people, there is an achievement of grace. And Paul is just very, very, very clear. There's a path of God to be part of.

He says, verse 13, that they must be rebuked sharply. So that the church may be found in the church. Because false teaching is found in the church. It undermines the testimony. And it reaches the truth of the church. It's a good way. Grounded in the church of the gospel.

Growing gospel leaders. God in the church. Titus. That's it. Why do these things matter? Well, because the church has never intended to be a little spiritual club turned in on itself. Indisible and erasant to the world. That will be a betrayal of our calling of the people of God. It's a serious and written chapter 3. No, we are called to participate in the greatness of God.

[14:31] We have chosen to live out the truth of the gospel in a world living in a life. And to do it compellingly. Attractively. Visibly.

Inescapably. Within our community. Grounded in the gospel. Multiplying gospel leaders. Courageously. Darving.

Just kidding. Churches like that are worth investing everything. They're worth giving themselves for. They're worth protecting. They're even worth dying.

They're worth giving themselves for. I think that's the church that you're aspiring to be. I've got these wonderful statements all around us here. So may God, by his word and spirit, teach them to put us together over the place of the way.

To be that people. Let's pray and then I'll just hand over this hand. Father, thank you for the amazing privilege of being called into the church of Jesus Christ.

[15:35] Thank you for choosing us. For giving us your truth. To live that truth in the world of the life. And to stand for it with courage and integrity.

We pray that you would use this rather neglected little book of Titus to deepen our understanding of what Jesus has done for us. And to strengthen our resolve to live in the life-giving deep of that truth. And to do so in such a way that the people around us can't help but see that there is a God in heaven who is doing things now on earth by his spirit in his son.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well thank you so much John for leading us through that first chapter.

I'm really looking forward to what's to come in chapters 2 and 3 that we're going to be looking at later today and tomorrow as well. Yeah, really inspiring and challenging. And yeah, just wonderful to think about the purposes God has for his church and how important that is to protect that as well.

[16:45] So thank you. Thank you John. We're going to break for coffee now. So just to explain how that's going to work. There's coffee available up here. That's especially for people who are going to find it difficult to get downstairs and get back up again in a short period of time.

So please make use of that. Also we've got the photo booth. So please, Emmanuel's here ready to snap away at the photo booth. So do please come and get a photo. The rest of the coffee is going to be downstairs in the main hall where we normally have coffee after church.

Oh, both. Also in the memorial lounge. If you've got children, please make a beeline to go straight to the memorial lounge where the navigators and trailblazers normally are. The one with the grey floor. Pick up your children and then have coffee.

That means our leaders there can have coffee as well. And we're going to come back at 11.55. So we've got just under half an hour. And we'll continue with the second session from John. 11.55.

So you've got half an hour to have coffee. Have chat. Do please come and talk to John and Alison. Make sure they get coffee. And come and have a photo as well. And enjoy the coffee. We'll see you at 11.55.

[17:49] Thank you. And we'll see you at 11.55.