



TITUS

A HEALTHY CHURCH

IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES: A HEALTHY CHURCH

TITLE: A HEALTHY CHURCH TAKES THE GOSPEL SERIOUSLY

SCRIPTURE: TITUS 3:3-8

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INTRODUCTION

What comes to mind when you think about a high school class reunion? Is it the nostalgia and fond memories or perhaps just how different the present is from the past? Is it a sense of astonishment that all of your old friends are now in fact exactly that...old?

If you have experienced a high school class reunion (or have seen them depicted in movies), you probably know that the event can cause mixed reactions/feelings for some. On the one hand, there may be hope or excitement about reuniting with long-lost classmates and the opportunity to rekindle friendships diminished by time and distance. However, for some, the distance between who they are in the present and who they were years ago may not be something they want to reflect on. Characteristics like weight (gain or loss), baldness, and other signs of aging, success in work/career/life (or lack thereof), or complicated marital/relationship status can bring a sense of tension or anxiety particularly when others may have a fixed image in mind of who someone was once upon a time. A professional success may not enjoy the

reminder that she was once a wallflower. Likewise, the standout athlete with can't-miss prospects may not enjoy the reminder of how far short of his dreams he fell. Regardless of the scenario, the tension of past versus present is one that certainly resonates with us.

In the passage today, Paul is going to tell a story. He is going to encourage Titus to share with his church a reminder of who they were, how they changed, and what that means for their future selves. The core of Paul's reminder is the Gospel, and as he will show, the Gospel does more than change who we were, it drives what we do next.

Text

Titus 3:3-8

³For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ⁸The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

Explanation

In these verses, Paul is going to build on his admonition to Titus in v. 1-2 on how he should instruct believers about how they are to act ("be ready for every good deed") and, in particular, how believers are to behave toward and treat others. But he is going to do so by outlining a story Titus is to tell them. A story they are quite familiar with—their own story of salvation through the Gospel. By walking them through their own journey, Paul is going to conclude in v. 8 where he started in v. 1 with a call for good deeds. In doing so, he is going to make clear that there is a purpose and motivation behind these deeds—The Gospel.

Paul starts in v. 3 with a difficult word of reminder. He presents a list of negative behaviors and attributes describing the kind of people the believers once were. Recall, in Titus 1:12-13, Paul had described Cretans to Titus as

“...always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” This harsh assessment of the reputation of the island’s culture reflected where the believers Titus now ministered to had come from as well as the milieu in which they now found themselves. Paul is reminding these believers of their past as a way to make clear how they are to live in this culture for the present.

However, it is worth noting this description was not just for Cretan Christians. After all, Paul used both “we” (which assumes he includes himself in this as well) and “ourselves.” By personalizing this past state of being, Paul punctures any sense of entitlement or pretense that these (or any) believers are better than or morally superior to others, even Cretans. Paul’s list of behaviors is extensive. The people who did these things are (or were) in real trouble. Paul does not do this in an attempt to manipulate or judge these individuals, but instead, he is presenting a clear-eyed perspective of what they have come from. As will be seen in the following verses, only when these believers accept and embrace this reality are they ready to fully embrace the full magnitude of what the Lord has in store for them.

Thankfully, Paul does not leave them in despondency. Rather, he immediately pivots to the Gospel reversing course with the conjunction “but,” signaling a major change. In v. 4–6, Paul walks through this truly life-changing Good News.

First, Paul makes clear this is wholly the work of God, initiated by God, and motivated solely by His character (emphasizing God’s kindness (v.4), love (v. 4), and mercy (v. 5). Paul is drawing a stark contrast between the futility of the sinful pre-Christ state of these people and the magnitude of the blessing that is the Gospel.

Second, Paul clearly states that salvation came not as the result of the works by these believers (“not on the basis of deeds” v. 5) but through “washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” that was “according to His mercy.” For all believers, we are the recipients of His kindness—truly this is Good News!

Finally, Paul points out the magnitude of this salvation. This presents a direct conflict to the futility of our state without Christ (v. 3) by emphasizing the work of Christ is “poured out upon us richly.” In essence, Paul is saying, “Yes, you were as bad or worse than you remember, but He is greater than we can ever imagine.” The only appropriate response when reminded of this fact is greater praise and gratitude for His saving work.

Paul not only works through the act of salvation in the Gospel but also points to the change in identity this brings as he calls these believers “heirs.” It is not enough that they are saved from something, Paul says they are saved for something and are now, in fact, part of something new and remarkable. This identity in Christ presents a sharp contrast to the stereotypical identity/behavior of Cretans as “liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons...” (see Titus 1:12), which Paul affirms. But as Paul calls on Titus to remind these believers, that is the old version of them. God is doing something new.

This all builds to his conclusion in v. 8 that these believers, recipients of the Gospel and a new identity of heirs of Christ, are to “engage in good deeds.” This is both a response to the magnitude of the salvation/redemption they have experienced, but it is also a reflection of how the Gospel replicates itself to others. Believers who feel the significance of their salvation will not only walk in obedience including acting with good deeds (see 3:1) but will do so in a manner that these good deeds shape how they behave with others outside their new family, in other words “showing every consideration for all men” (3:2). The Gospel changes how we relate to others, and a Church filled with believers overwhelmed by how they have been changed will in turn behave that demonstrates the Gospel to all people.

Discussion Questions

1. Recall Paul’s description in Titus 1:12–13 of the reputation and culture of Crete. How is this reputation reflected in this passage? How does this influence Paul’s message to the church in Crete through this charge to Titus?
2. Why does Paul start this section by urging Titus to walk these believers through a look back on how they once behaved and who they once were? Why would he bring up past sinful behaviors if we know these have been forgiven by the Lord (consider Rom. 8:1)? Is God holding onto the memory of their past sin as something they should be ashamed of?
3. Reading through Paul’s recounting of the Gospel in v. 4–6, did anything stand out or particularly encourage you? Take a moment to reflect on this Good News and consider how recently you have done so. How can we do more to keep these truths in mind?
4. What can we learn about the continued role of the Gospel in shaping and encouraging believers even years after their salvation? How can we as individuals and a church learn from this approach and even incorporate it into our own lives?

5. Why does it help to remember who we were before Christ? How is this a critical piece of our understanding of the Gospel? How does this shape our perspective on how we treat other people?
6. Compare the references to “deeds” in Chapter 3. How does the context of “deeds” in v. 5 help us better understand Paul’s admonition for good deeds in v. 1 and 8?

Conclusions or Applications

REGULARLY REMIND YOURSELF OF THE GOSPEL’S WORK IN YOU

Paul’s message to Titus for the church in Crete is one that resonates with us as believers today. As Paul said in v. 3, “we also once were...” Every one of us has a past that we were saved from and, as Paul reminds us, a future we are saved for. While we are no longer subject to condemnation for our past, it is important to remember the magnitude of his mercy poured out on us “richly.” When presented with this reality, we cannot help but respond with gratitude, praise, and a desire to walk in obedience. The lesson from Paul is that we need to keep this reality in mind, remaining clear-eyed about the sinful state we were saved from.

THE GOSPEL SHAPES HOW WE LIVE AND ACT

Having received so great a salvation, we as believers are now to live differently. This includes walking in obedience to the Lord but also “engag[ing] in good deeds” toward others, including those who do not yet know the Lord. Recognizing the sorry state we were saved from, these good deeds are not a way to claim superiority but rather an outgrowth of genuine gratitude for the change made in us by the Lord through the Holy Spirit. If we find ourselves tempted toward arrogance or pride, we should employ Paul’s strategy and remind ourselves of who we once were and how great He is for saving us. That will reset our attitude and reorient our behaviors to walk humbly and obediently.

