

Set in Order Sermon Series – Sermon 1 – 1st things 1st (part 1) – Titus 1:1

Intro:

1) Have you ever purchased something that needed to be built/assembled, and you convinced yourself you didn't really need the instructions – it seemed simple enough?

- a. Sometimes it turns out ok – other times, not so much

2) Story – The Ikea Disaster

- a. Man decided he didn't need the instructions to build his new Ikea bookshelf
 - i. Opened box, saw hundreds of tiny screws, dowels, and mysterious pieces and thought – “How hard can it be? I'm a grown adult – I'll figure it out”
 - ii. Two hours later – he had built something that looked more like a modern art sculpture than a bookshelf
 - 1. One side leaned, middle shelf sagged, top piece didn't fit at all, there were left over parts
 - 2. Out of frustration he murmured – “This company makes terrible furniture”
 - iii. His wife came in, quickly picked up the crumpled instructions and said, “It's not the furniture that's flawed – it's the builder who wouldn't follow the directions”
 - iv. He swallowed his pride, started over – this time following the steps in order
 - 1. Took half the time, shelves were straight, strong, and secure

3) When we ignore the proper order of things – it rarely turns out well

- a. This is especially true when it comes to ignoring God's order
 - i. In our: homes, marriages, churches, and hearts

4) Paul's letter to the young pastor Titus was written to edify Titus in getting the right ordering of things within the Cretan churches

- a. The Cretan churches looked like that wobbly bookshelf
 - i. All the right pieces, just not in the right places
- b. Notice this instruction Paul gives Titus – 1:5
 - i. Set in order – restore the proper order
 - 1. Root – to correct, to amend, to make right
 - ii. Things that are wanting – present active participle
 - 1. These issues weren't one-time-problems, these were on-going issues invading the life of the church
- c. As we will learn – the Island of Crete was full of ungodliness and Titus had his work cut out for him in the task of setting it in order

- 5) **We will learn more about the purpose of this pastoral epistle in the coming weeks, but for now, we need to understand that this is a letter seeking to bring Biblical order into a chaotic mess**
 - a. Truth – when we ignore God’s order, life doesn’t operate in stability, it operates in shambles
 - b. Sentence – Biblical order isn’t a burden you bare, it’s the structure that allows blessings to be received
- 6) **Sermon Series – Set in Order**
 - a. How God’s ordering structures the blessed life
- 7) **This morning, we are going to examine the opening verse as Paul begins to address young Titus with the truth of the Gospel**
 - a. This opening statement sets the tone of this letter as it centers on the Gospel and a Gospel-centric ministry
 - b. In other words – the opening greeting reminds us – if you’re going to live a life on Biblical order, it must start with getting the Gospel right
- 8) **Sermon: 1st things 1st – part 1**
 - a. Text: Titus 1:1
 - b. In the opening salutation Paul emphasized 3 key Gospel-centric aspect to a life and ministry that is “set in order”
 - i. God’s Authority
 - ii. God’s Agenda
 - iii. God’s Announcement
 - c. MacArthur
 - i. God’s Mastery
 - ii. God’s Mission
 - iii. God’s Message

Emphasis on God's Authority

1) Sentence – You can't set things in order until you know who's in charge

- a. Setting something in the right order begs the question – “Who has the authority to establish the order?”
- b. Problem – Our flesh loves to be in charge and usurp God's authority
 - i. It's what led to the 1st sin
 - ii. It's what leads to us sinning
 - iii. There's still this struggle present in a believer's life – Gal 5:17

2) Paul opens this letter with an emphasis on God's authority before he moves on to the order of other things

- a. V1
- b. You might be asking – Pastor, how does that verse reveal an emphasis on God's authority?
 - i. Ans – notice – Paul didn't open this letter by identifying himself by his position, but rather by his submission
 - ii. The titles Paul uses here in V1 are titles which emphasize God's authority over Paul's life
- c. In essence – Paul is revealing that he is under God's authority and that God's authority gives direction to everything else which follows

3) 3 aspects of Paul's life that emphasizes God's authority in V1

- a. Paul's servanthood
- b. Paul's sending
- c. Paul's stewardship

Paul's Servanthood

1) It's fascinating to me the title Paul opens this letter with

- a. Think of all the titles Paul could have used to brag about his superiority
 - i. Phil. 3:4-6: learning, living, and law-abiding
- b. Rather he chose to identify himself 1st and foremost as the servant of God
- c. In other words – Paul did not open with his superiority, he opened with his servanthood

2) What's interesting about Paul calling himself a servant is that there was a significant stigma attached to that word in the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day

- a. Servant – *doulos* – refers to the most servile person in that culture
 - i. It was a word that denotes the idea of slave hood
 - ii. It's often translated as "slave"
- b. Social stigma – title carried the idea of someone who was the property of another
 - i. A *doulos* had no personal rights, in some cases a slave was not even legally recognized as a person
 - 1. Roman law classified slaves as "things" rather than having personhood
 - ii. A slave could be bought, sold, punished, or even freed depending entirely on the master's own discretion
 - iii. In Paul's day, a slave was to be considered an instrument of the master's will
 - 1. A tool to be used
 - 2. In the social sense – being a slave carried the idea of being of a very low status
 - iv. Being a slave in the Greco-Roman world was having a life which was in direct contrast to the Roman ethos of: *Libertas* (freedom), *Dignitas* (honor), and *autonomia* (self-rule)
- c. Cultural stigma
 - i. To understand how scandalous this title would be for someone to bear it willfully, we need to understand that in the Greco-Roman culture the highest virtue was that of freedom – both civil and personal
 - 1. A freed Roman took great pride in their independence and social standing
 - ii. To call oneself a slave willfully was self-degrading and counter-cultural
- d. For Paul to open his letter with such a designation would have jarred any gentile ears listening
 - i. It's a title which culturally conveys a loss of dignity, power, freedom, and status
- e. Yet – this was the title Paul used to describe himself and his relationship with God

3) Although the title servant-slave was an undesirable title in a social/cultural sense, when you look at the title through NT eyes, we see what Paul was conveying spiritually

- a. We could say - Paul used this term with a theological emphasis

4) Theologically speaking – when Paul deliberately embraces this title, he does so to make a sound theological argument

- a. In essence Paul was saying “I know who hold the authority in my life”
- b. Paul often used this term to describe himself and his service to God
 - i. He did not mean it in a self-depreciating manner, he used it in a way that revealed the truth of Whom he belonged to
- c. Being a “servant of God” mean Paul was in complete, but willing, submission to God
 - i. He did not consider his life his own – he lived for the Lord
 - ii. This title conveys that Paul submitted his will, purposes, and plans to the Lord
 - iii. “In every thought, every breath, and every effort he was under the mastery of God.” – J. Mac
- d. Paul as a “servant of God” meant he considered himself wholly belonging to the Lord – not just as a worker, but as a totally dependent servant

5) Through usage of this title we see Paul understood that his identity and honor was found in his relationship to the Lord not in self-advancement

- a. In other words – in a culture which operates from a shame/honor perspective, Paul essentially flips the script on what it means to be a servant to God
 - i. What his society would call disgraceful, in the right ordering, Paul reveals is honorable

Application

1) As a pastoral letter – Paul was edifying Titus to abstain from leading God’s people as a domineering overseer, but as a servant-leader who is under Divine authority

- a. Unlike the common leadership culture of his day, Paul set the example that God’s leaders lead tenderly
 - i. 1 Pet. 5:1-4
- b. As a letter emphasizing the right order of things, this title encourages us in our own leadership to remember, Godly leadership starts at the Master’s feet
 - i. Leaders are to lead from out front, but never out front of Jesus
 - ii. Paul is about to share some things which may not be easily received by a people living in a God-rejecting society
 - 1. Rather than bend the knee to culture, Paul set the example of humble leadership which stands tall on Jesus

2) True servants of God measure success in terms of faithfulness, not fame

- a. Paul wasn’t seeking to win a popularity contest
- b. Using this title tells us Paul wasn’t out for prestige, he was living out Divine purpose
- c. Remember – its well done thy good and FAITHFUL servant

3) This title is a reminder to us that you are a servant/slave to something/someone

- a. It may have been a scandal in Paul's day to identify as a servant, but truth be told, everyone who read this letter was a servant
 - i. To sin/self or the Savior
- b. Paul outlines this argument in Rom. 6:16-18
 - i. Listen – Rom. 6:20-23
- c. This title highlights the freedom one has in a right relationship with God
 - i. Free from sin and able to experience righteousness, cumulating not in death, but in life

Digging Deeper

1) Interesting – Servant of God – not the servant of Jesus (Rom. 1:1, Gal. 1:10, Phil. 1:1)

- a. This is the only place in the NT where Paul uses this designation
- b. Begs the question – Why?

2) 2 schools of thought

- a. It's a literary device used by Paul to not sound repetitious given the following phrase
 - i. Follows the emphasis of the letter which seeks to identify God with Jesus
 - ii. Basically – the shift is not that significant
- b. A purpose-filled shift to identify Paul with the OT servants of God emphasizing God's authority and unity with God's purposes
 - i. There is a significant list of key OT figures who are called the servants of God
 - ii. Abraham – Ps. 105:42
 - iii. Moses – Deut. 34:5, Neh. 9:14
 - iv. David – Ps. 89:3
 - v. Daniel – Dan. 6:20
 - vi. Prophets – Jer. 25:4, Ez. 38:7, Amos 3:7
- c. By using this title, Paul was putting himself in the long line of faithful servants of God stretching back into the OT
 - i. Why?
 - ii. One of the key issues Titus had to set in order was the false teachers and teachings of the Judaizers – 1:10,11
 - iii. Using this title was a subtle, yet effective way of affirming his authority as God's servant and combating the teachers who were causing problems

Paul's Sending

1) The next title Paul opens with reveals in what capacity he functions as God's servant

- a. V1b
- b. In other words – Paul's specific duty to God was to fulfill the office and role of apostleship

2) What does it mean when Paul uses the title "apostle"

- a. Apostle – *apostolos* – a sent messenger
 - i. In the first century – the common usage of this term indicated a special messenger, often an ambassador who came bearing an important message
- b. Like the former title, this title also gives homage to God as authority
 - i. An apostolos was often a person sent with a specific message, and who spoke that message in the full authority of the one who sent him
 - ii. The authority in which the messenger spoke with was not founded in the messenger, but in the sender
 - 1. In this case – Jesus Christ

3) Clarity – in the NT, this term appears in two scopes – both important for us to understand

- a. Broad scope – a messenger of the church
 - i. In the NT we have examples of people being called an apostle/messenger who were simply sent out by the church to carry the message and teachings of the Gospel to a people
 - 1. Barnabas – Acts 14:14
 - 2. Epaphroditus – Phil. 2:25
 - ii. In this sense of the word, it would refer to someone who we would call a "missionary"
 - iii. Characteristics
 - 1. Commissioned by a local church for a task
 - 2. Represented Jesus and that local church, often reporting back to that church
 - 3. Did NOT possess any revelatory mandate or apostolic authority accompanied by signs and wonders
- b. Narrow scope – 12 apostles and Paul who was considered an apostle "born out of due time" (1 Cor. 15:8,9)
 - i. In this sense, the word refers to the small, unique group of men personally chosen and commissioned by Jesus to be His authoritative representatives in the 1st century, establishing the church doctrines, and affirmed by signs and wonders
 - ii. Characteristics
 - 1. Personally called by Jesus
 - 2. Eyewitnesses to Jesus' life/resurrection
 - 3. Apostolic authority
 - 4. Revelatory mandate

- 4) In this passage Paul is referring to the narrow scope of the term as one who is speaking with authority from God

Application – This unique title gives us some practical reminders as we seek to live out a faithful life of being a messenger/ambassador of Christ

1) A messenger submits before he/she speaks

- a. Notice Paul places this title AFTER servant – not the way our flesh would want it
- b. We live in a culture obsessed with self-empowerment, but as a messenger of Jesus, we must focus on self-submission
 - i. We must let Jesus' words shape our words

2) A messenger represents, not replaces, the Master

- a. As apostle was a legal representative of the one who sent them
 - i. So serious was this task that rejecting the messenger was treated as a rejection of the sender himself
- b. We must keep in mind Who we represent in this world
- c. As believers, we must stay keen to the fact that we do not speak from personal opinion, but from Divine revelation
 - i. This is about to be vital in the counter-cultural truths of this letter
- d. It is imperative that we understand – our task is not to edit God's word, it is to echo God's Word

Paul's Stewardship

- 1) In closing this opening verse, we read what message the messenger was sharing**
 - a. V1c
 - b. In essence, as the messenger of Jesus, Paul's ministry purpose was to share the Gospel and the truth of God's word

- 2) Important to know – the term “according/after” in the opening salutation is a word which marks a connection**
 - a. Greek – *Kata* – basic meaning is “down”
 - i. Word indicating movement or direction
 1. Special sense – get down from there
 2. Figurative sense – being “against” something
 3. Idiomatic sense – concerning/according
 - ii. It's a word of connection
 - b. In other words – the ending of V1 is the overflow of the beginning of V1
 - c. “[This word gives us the] standard by which Paul's apostleship can be measured and evaluated.” – Homer Kent

- 3) Paul's ministry as messenger was to share the word of God and see the church grow**
 - a. Through new converts – God's elect
 - b. Through sanctification – knowledge of the truth

- 4) This is too important for us to miss here – notice the outline Paul gives for the growth of the church**
 - a. Sharing the Gospel and teaching the word of truth
 - i. Acknowledging – *epignosis* – a full or thorough knowledge/discernment
 1. Refers to the clear perception of a truth – J. Mac
 - b. Notice what Paul did not lay out as the mandate for church growth
 - i. Trendy church style, music style, contemporary or traditional methodology

Application

- 1) Stick to God's word if you desire to see Godly growth**

Closing

- 1) Notice the order Paul gives here**
 - a. Faith than a knowledge of the truth leading to Godliness
 - b. Another way to say it – faith than growth
 - i. Receive the gospel than live Godly
 - c. These NT churches were plagued by Judaizers who sought to teach that in opposite order
 - i. Actions than atonement not atonement than actions
 - d. Its as if Paul wanted this vital order known from the very start

