

A Mythology of Truth

Titus 1:1-4

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If you didn't already know, for the next five weeks we will be in the book of Titus. Let me jump straight into some context. The book of Titus is written by the apostle Paul to one of his disciples, a man by the name of... yes, Titus. We don't know much about Titus from the Biblical witness. We know he is greek, not Jewish, and he has been a partner with Paul for a while at this point. He was there when Paul and Peter and the Jerusalem council decided that uncircumcised Jews did not need to be circumcised to receive the gospel (and I'm sure he was relieved at that), and he followed Paul on his missionary journeys, spending a significant time in Corinth. The church in Corinth is famously known for having a lot of issues and problems, but Paul trusted Titus to handle the disputes there. Now Paul goes with Titus to the island of Crete (that long island off the coast of Greece) to plant a church there, but hastily has to leave for Ephesus. So Titus is left in Crete to begin to shape and mold and form the church there. Now Paul is writing back to him specific instructions as to how to build a healthy church. This is the book of Titus: instructions for a new church.

So why preach the book of Titus? Why now?

We want to be a healthy church. A Godly church. A gospel-proclaiming church. Well, Titus, in just six weeks, is going to lay for us the foundation as to how we achieve Biblical health. In Titus we will see explained at least three things: what it means to have healthy leadership, what it means to have healthy doctrine, and what it means to have healthy culture, or practice. Leadership, doctrine, practice.

The book of Titus was written for a *young* church in Crete. The work on Crete was growing, the disciples there were hungry to know and understand, but they were new at this. And frankly, Church, we haven't been long at this. Grace Church as we know began less than a decade ago, and so many of us have felt the drastic winds of sovereign change here in the last few months. We need the book of Titus, because it shows us how to be a church that grows in a countercultural way. It shows us teaching and doctrine that is entirely robust and countercultural. And ultimately Titus will show us that that right teaching and doctrine leads to holiness and godliness. In other words, for a young, changing, church, what better way to achieve maturity than to uncover what the Word of God has for a young, changing church in Crete?

But besides their infancy, the church in Crete also were heavily influenced by a very specific cultural setting. More isolated than the rest of the roman world, the small greek island possesses a distinct mythology.

You Are a Product of Your Mythology

A myth is a story or history that makes up the belief of a specific culture or people. Think about it this way: the mythology that you believe is the set of ideas that is ingrained in the culture you live in. There is a doctrine that our culture is teaching us, a history of stories and tales, lessons on what is good and right and acceptable and what is not. Our culture is consistently creating and crafting a mythology: a set of stories and teaching, though both history and fantasy, that shape what we believe.

And here is the thing about what we believe. It never stays in our head. It gets into our heart, and eventually comes out of our hands. Our mind, soul, and body are all linked together in a chain of command. Our mythology influences our doctrine, what we believe, and our doctrine influences our living.

The theme you're going to see all throughout the letter is this: there is an inextricable link between gospel belief and gospel behavior, between sound doctrine and sound living, between the good gospel and the good works that flow from it. So it all starts with what you are taught. And Paul starts off his letter to Titus by engaging the mythology of Crete, the cultural doctrine of Crete, head-on. Paul knows if he can get their heads to understand the pure, unadulterated gospel, free from entanglement from long established or newly forming popular beliefs, then the heart and hands will follow. This is why our time in Titus is taglined: right doctrine, right living.

So where do we start? We start with right doctrine. But in order to get there, we have to break down some barriers. And the biggest barrier for Crete, and so often for us, was their false mythology. Their mythology led them to false doctrines and corrupted their gospel witness. Throughout the book of Titus, then, we will see Paul hinting at different issues creeping into the doctrine of the church in Crete by way of their mixing of mythologies.

The mythology of Crete is centered on their differing view of the most prominent of Greek gods: Zeus. You see, the Cretan Zeus was not quite like the classic Zeus you might have heard of. Olympos, thunder, you know, like the Disney movie Hercules. His roots go back even further, he is more ancient. In Cretan mythology, he was actually a man first, and due to his prominence and service for the island of Crete, he became a god and was deified.

Cretans believed the tomb of Zeus was also located on Crete. The interesting thing about this Zeus was that he was not known for being a great guy, even though he became deified. His mythology consists of countless stories of his never-ending desire to seduce various women, usually by lying and pretending he was someone he was not. Story after story of Cretan Zeus finds him taking advantage of his deity to just get whatever pleasure he can get ahold of.

Because of this differing mythology, and due also to the fact that Crete was more cut off from the mainland of eastern Europe, Cretans developed a particular culture that was frowned upon. Paul mentions this in his letter to Titus, we see it in **verse 12**. One of their own poets calls them out as liars, beasts, gluttons! Because of their cultural variation, Cretans are frowned upon. You see, something happened along the way on this ancient island. The stories they told, the mythology they created, shaped the values of their culture. Left to themselves, this culture promoted a god who stole, cheating, lied, slept around, indulged, and generally acted like an “evil beast”. Their mythology impacted their doctrine, or their belief, and their doctrine impacted the way they lived. They became a product of their cultural mythology.

So it is with us. We are the products of our mythologies: the stories we believe to be true, the doctrines we believe, are what shape us and make us who we are.

Like the church in Crete, not only are we young and immature as a body, we also live in a cultural setting that is shifting day by day. The new sexual ethic and morality of a post-Christian culture is beginning to set in, even here in the south. When this happens, there is a danger that the “mythology”, the story of America, circa 2019, might seep in and influence what we believe and eventually how we live. We cannot escape being taught by what we learn and consume. The cultural roots of America are showing: individualism consumes us as our most unified battle cry. Drive around town on any given Saturday, and witness how much we *consume*.

There are roots here, even in Waco, of our mythology: roots of racism, hatred, and hypocrisy. Maybe you know the story of Jesse Washington, the seventeen year old black man famously lynched here in our city one hundred years ago by an angry mob. More likely than not you also know our history is marked by the Branch Davidians and the Waco siege in the early 90s. The mythology of Waco in our day and age is one we must pay attention to. We should notice the fact that gentrification is real, and that although our economy is growing significantly with the influx of tourism, some residents may be suffering. We have to acknowledge the fact that Waco is changing, growing, shifting, but still segregated. I am not here to hate on Magnolia and other new business—we all benefit

from the rising tide of their efforts, but we must also be careful. I love living in this city, a city that is changing and whose culture is forming again. But we have to ask the question: what will the new mythology of Waco be built on? Consumerism? Feel-good small town peace and quiet? If so, will we allow this mythology to teach us our doctrine without filtering it through the lens of the gospel? Will we be a young, immature church who falls into the trap of worldliness? Will our hearts and our hope and our faith be placed in the same things that the world around us does? I pray Titus would be our wake-up call to make us Godly, mature, disciples of Jesus. As we learn to understand the pure gospel doctrine, we let it shape our lives.

We are products of our mythology. The Cretans were, and so are we. The American Dream still runs in our veins. We are entitled, individualistic consumers. This is our mythology.

But here, after our extended intro, we break open the text, the authoritative, beautiful word of God, and what do we find in the book of Titus? Instructions to a young church, like us, on how to learn a new mythology, a mythology not distinct to Crete, to the United States, or to Waco. Here we see a mythology of the people of God. The first thing we see in the book of Titus is that God has revealed a mythology of truth.

God Has Revealed A Mythology of Truth (1a)

Read verse 1 again with me. Here is the first thing I want you to notice that came up in my study this week. Paul uses a unique greeting: Paul, a servant, slave is the word here. This term for Paul, slave or servant, is not uncommon—he uses it in many of his letters to showcase his humility and belonging to Jesus. So it is not the word servant that is unique here, it is the phrase “servant of God”. In all of Paul’s other letters, whenever he uses the word for servant or slave, he calls himself a servant of Jesus, or Jesus Christ, or Christ Jesus. This is the only letter where Paul calls himself a servant of God.

This may seem like a small point to you, but I think it is not coincidental. This phrase pulls us back in our mind to think of all the times in the Old Testament that this kind of title: servant of God is used. This phraseology is used to designate all the leaders of the Old Testament: Moses¹, Abraham², David³, Jacob⁴, the list goes on and on. Prophets, men of

¹ Ps. 104:26

² Ps 104:42

³ Ps. 88:4

God, servants of Almighty. Paul's use of this phrase is pulling on one thing: his authority as a direct servant of God, as a man of God.

For his second punch of authority, Paul calls upon his apostleship. Paul is linking here the visible manifestation and calling out that he received from Jesus himself. He is an apostle because he received the message of the gospel from Jesus in a way that is unique: firsthand. This gives him a certain authority that does not exist today.

What is the point? The point is to show that Paul is infusing his future instructions to Timothy, the instructions that we will spend several weeks unpacking, with holy authority. The servant of God and the apostle of Jesus is writing here, to the **elect**, or the people of God in Crete, as an authoritative witness. Paul has this story, this mythology, that is unique to the people of God, passed on by the servants of God and culminating in Jesus Christ. There is a mythology that is not crafted by human hands, but is created and woven by God and carried along by his servants. And what is this story? Paul says it in verse 1: it's a **knowledge of the truth**.

You see, Church, God is a mythologist. From the beginning, God has been crafting a story which shapes what we believe and the way that we act. What is the main difference between this mythology from God and the mythology of the Cretans, or the Greeks, or the Americans, or the Wacoans? This mythology is truth. It was C.S. Lewis who came to faith following an obsession from childhood with ancient Norse mythology, searching for meaning in it after he realized that Christianity is not some dry, hard facts. Christianity is a story: a myth. But with one distinct difference that makes all the difference: "Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference; that it really happened."⁵

What is this true mythology? It is none other than the hope of the gospel, which has been brewing from before time began and is finally revealed in Jesus. God has revealed to us the gospel, church. He has been slowly unveiling this good news, and it all culminates in a real Jesus who is really God and who really died on our behalf to really bring us back to God. This is the true mythology, the mythology that should shape our doctrine and our living. Because it's true. This doesn't mean it is just *historically* true—it is, but after all, Jesus spoke in parables all the time. Our imaginations aren't dead. It means that there is no

⁴ Is. 48:20

⁵<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/85-years-ago-today-j-r-r-tolkien-convinces-c-s-lewis-that-christ-is-the-true-myth/>

falsehood in it: it will not lead you astray. It is upright, whole, honest, true. The mythology of Christianity tells a story that unlocks all the mystery of humanity.

So Paul breaks in, from the beginning of his letter, to authoritatively show us the knowledge of the truth. We don't have to be shaped by false mythologies: God has revealed the only true one.

I want you to see then with me four aspects of this true mythology. I hope as we work our way through the book of Titus, this will keep coming back up as we lay the foundation for a healthy church.

The **Purpose** of this Mythology: Faith and Knowledge Working Into Godliness (1b)

I will make this point quick, because we have already mentioned it and we will see it again as a major theme of Titus. Titus is showing us that you believe what you know and you become what you believe. **Read verse 1 again.** The faith of God's elect directly correlates to their knowledge of the truth, and that knowledge breeds faith.

The simple fact of the matter is, you are a theologian. I don't know if you've ever considered yourself one, but you are. You have thoughts about God. You have some sort of knowledge, even if that knowledge is not developed. You can't escape this. One of the ways we let false mythology shape us as Christians is that often we tend to pit the life of the mind against a life of faith. Those with strong faith believe: they don't need to study. Why study God? Why do we need theology? We just believe and trust.

But it's books like Titus that rip holes through that false dichotomy faster than a sub-machine gun firing on a paper cup. Pitting knowledge and faith against each other is unbiblical. Titus will show us that the purpose of God's story is that our faith and our knowledge of it works together to produce Godly living. We are all theologians, and we are called to be good ones. We do not deny the study of God and of his word—we practice the discipline of theology so that our faith is strengthened as we *know* God. And once our faith is strengthened, we produce godliness. The purpose of the book of Titus, as it reveals the good news of Jesus being the true mythology of God, is that faith and knowledge would work itself out into godliness.

Never forget that what you study is what you believe and what you believe is what you act on. Study so that you might gain a knowledge of the truth of Jesus in all things. Whether

your area of study is medicine, engineering, kindergartners, photography, or motherhood—we are all meant to be students of the truth. We are all theologians: so let's be good ones, searching deeply the story of God for a knowledge of the truth.

The **Veracity** of this Mythology: Written in Eternity by a God Who Does Not Lie (2)

The context we must be careful not to forget is that the centerpiece of the cultural mythology of Crete was Zeus. As we've already mentioned, he was not a stand-up deity in a moralistic sense. His main claim to fame in Crete was his continual conniving and deception that led him to indulge himself on whatever woman he wished. And yet, here was a people and a culture that took after him. They became what they worshiped.

The social imagination of Crete was consumed by, proud of, a lying, immoral deity. I don't think I have to stress, then, the importance of what Paul is saying here in the opening of his letter. He could have said plenty of other things about God's character: he might have mentioned more his preeminence, his glory as creator, his unchanging and eternal nature, but what does he zero in on? His truthfulness.

The Cretans were told stories of Zeus from birth. They knew of his lies and deception. They accepted it: that's just how gods act. It makes sense then, that as the gospel is spread across the island that one of the first questions of the new believers would be: is Yahweh like Zeus? It makes sense that they might expect God Almighty to have a little trickery in him. Who can blame a God, after all, for utilizing his power to gain an advantage?

Remember this, church: all other mythologies that do not lead to the truth of the gospel lead us into false promises and false pretenses. They lie to us.

Consider one false mythology that is prominent in our culture today: health and wellness. Gyms and health clubs are a multi-billion dollar industry. The diet industry is right behind. There is nothing wrong with being physically fit or eating well, but do you know when the health industry really took off? With the invention of mass-market cameras. Once people got images of themselves, we slowly began to fall headlong into the trap of a false mythology: that the reason we should be fit and well is so that we can look better for others to see us. One author says that this shows we believe that our bodies have become "the canvas on which we exercise our will to power."⁶ If we can change what we *look* like, then we can show how in control of our life we are.

⁶ Kevin Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers*, 34.

But this mythology of self-improvement and self-will power is a false mythology. The story of the cross directly contradicts it: it shows an ugly, sin stained-people who are transformed into glory not by going to the gym more but by being born again in the likeness of Christ, no matter what their physical appearance looks like. So the apostle Paul exposes the lie in his letter to the Corinthians when he says: “you are not your own, but you were bought with a price, so glorify God with your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). THE mythology of wellness and fitness for the sake of self-improvement leads you into the lie that you are the master of your own fate.

This is just one example. Again, all other mythologies that do not lead to the truth of the gospel lead us into false promises and false pretenses. But Paul makes this clear: our hope of eternal life is not dependant on a god like Zeus. We do not build a healthy church on shaky foundation. We don't give everything up for a lie. No, our God makes up the very essence of truth. Nothing that escapes from his lips is falsehood—no promise of his goes unfulfilled. If we would be a healthy church, we have to start here: with a faithful hope that the gospel plan was laid out from ages past as is secured forever by a God who does not lie. Who cannot lie. Who will not lie.

Not only will false mythologies lead you to lies, all other mythologies that do not lead us to the truth of the gospel will be forgotten or reduced to lifeless hoaxes with no eternal hope or significance. They will all be forgotten in time.

No one really worships Zeus anymore. Chances are, in a thousand years, no one will worship the American Dream either. All of these things will be forgotten and pass away, because they are not eternal. But **read verse 2** again. What is this new story that Paul is building the health of the Cretan truth on? A hope that was promised before the ages began. You see, The true mythology of the gospel of Jesus is not a passive force in your life. It is not a story, like that of Zeus and Countless others, will be lost in the pages of history. This is an eternal story, an eternally unfolding revelation of the character and nature of God.

The good news about this doctrine, this mythology, this story that we get to be a part of, is that it's truthfulness and timelessness gives us an unflinching hope. Maybe the early Cretans had a strong hope in Zeus. Maybe, if you are young, you have a strong hope in your future career, or your young marriage. But those things are not eternal—the image of Zeus is only found on dusty old stone temple facades these days. Your career will probably fair much worse: maybe your accomplishments will be documented in a footnote somewhere, or a pdf file stored away in a discarded hard drive. But that's about it. We

learned from Ecclesiasties that chasing after your vain, temporal life as if it is eternal is like chasing after the wind. Eventually any hope you have in yourself will fade.

All other mythologies that do not lead us to the truth of the gospel will be forgotten or reduced to lifeless hoaxes with no eternal hope or significance. But what does an understanding of the truthfulness and timelessness of God give us? A hope of eternal life. A hope that is stored up for us in a new heaven and new earth, where dust and moth will not destroy and no thief can break in and steal.

You may be hesitant today, in the circumstances of your life, to believe that God cannot lie. His promises just don't seem true to you. Life can do that to us. Cancer causes doubt. Marital tension causes doubt. Is God a liar? Or maybe your zeal and tenacity for your faith has lessened of late. You are wondering, "will this whole Jesus thing pan out for me?" Here is what you need: a reminder to buy into this crazy story that God creator almighty sent his only son to die, rise, and bring you into union with him. Why? Not because you feel it right now, but because you are a witness to the eternal truthfulness of this story. It starts before time began, and it has continued in the hearts of the people of God. It is carried along by a God who cannot and will not lie. Rest on that.

Or maybe your thought is different. Maybe you think, so what if it is promised from before the ages began? I don't feel this hope of eternal life *now*. I don't see the importance of this mythology of the gospel. Life is hard. Well here we have another thing to learn

The ***Immediacy*** of this Mythology: Revealed Now and Forever Through the Preaching of Gospel Salvation (3)

You see, we are not just a confident, waiting people, on this side of the cross. The Cretans, they looked back at their mythology: they learned stories of Zeus from old that were supposed to inspire them and shape them. In America, we tend to look forward—always progressing, trying to *become* something.

But the good news of the gospel is that it is a story that encompasses the past, the future hope, and also the *present*. **Read verse 3 again.** At the right time, the proper time, Paul is reminding the Cretans through Titus that this mythology of truth starts now. They get to be swallowed up in it today.

Such good news for us, because we are impatient people, aren't we. My wife had our baby this week. Dang, we waited for that little dude for what seemed like ages. He was a week

late, and that week felt like a year. We wanted him to be here with us, not just a future hope.

I think this kind of impatience often marks the people of God. We know this world is not our home, and rightly we await the day where the kingdom of God will be properly manifested. But don't miss this point: the kingdom of God will come, yes, but it also HAS come. The proper time was the incarnation: Jesus broke into the world with a silent but earth-shattering act of fulfillment. All the waiting was over—he was born not a moment too soon or too late.

Here is the significance of this: we are a people who have been transformed by seeing Jesus, and we live out that transformation here on earth. How does Paul say that this eternal hope has been manifested? In the preaching, the proclaiming of his word. This means if you are a Christian, at some point you heard the word of God. The word of God revealed Jesus and his gospel news to you. You repented, had faith and believe. That day, that moment, you became new. It was the moment where you not only received a hope of glory, or saw a long line of past glory, but you were swept up with Jesus in the present.

No other cultural mythology can offer that kind of immediacy. Think of it this way: we often buy into the mythology that happiness requires financial success. So what do you do? We save, we invest, we store away. We await the day where we we will be finally fulfilled. But we never quite reach it, do we? We never quite have enough. But the good news of Jesus is different. You don't have to save up your good works to get God to save you. You don't have to invest beforehand and wait for the return. You don't have to fill out a salvation form and send it in the mail. The moment you repent and believe through the word being preached to you, you immediately are swept up into this story. You become part of the story. You are immediately rich, a benefactor of all the riches of Jesus in your union with him.

This is good news, because it grounds us. We await a glorious future, yes, but we are not lame ducks. Healthy churches know they have been transformed by the gospel, and by the power of the Spirit they preach and proclaim with boldness the gospel that can and will transform with utter immediacy all who hear and believe. God is not dragging his feet, Paul reminds the Cretans. He brought salvation at exactly the right time.

Let me end this morning with this thought. Paul makes one last point in his intro to Titus. Before he goes on to instruct on healthy church leadership, healthy doctrine, and healthy church culture, he reminds us of the center of all we do.

The **Center** of this Mythology: Jesus Christ as True Savior (4)

We may want to glance over verse 4 as just a typical Pauline greeting and giving of blessing, but there is one significant point we cannot miss. Paul's language here is again unique to the book of Titus. Notice how he repeats the title "savior" in verses 3 and 4. What is he up to? He is linking the nature and character of God directly with that of Christ. In essence, he is taking Titus by the hand and reminding him something the Cretans need to know: Jesus is fully God. Jesus is the savior, just as the Father who send him is. Jesus is the king.

This title "savior" would be familiar to the Cretans. It was used by Caesar, ruler of the Greek world, including Crete, at this point. He called himself the savior of the people. But Caesar is no Jesus.

Remember also the mythology of Crete: the centerpiece of their mythology was Zeus. Before he became a god, Zeus was a man, like everyone else. And even in becoming God, he maintained some of his earthly desires and vices. But Zeus is no Jesus.

Here Paul is making a subtle point: you use to worship Zeus, the imperfect man who became an imperfect god. Now you worship Jesus, the perfect God who became a perfect man. Paul highlights the deity of Christ as the true savior: the God who was willing to condescended, who has no imperfection of the sin humanity in him. Zeus had to learn to be a god—Jesus is an eternally was and eternally will be, God.

This makes him the only fit centerpiece for the counter-cultural mythology that the church in Crete is to be built on. As fully God, Jesus is the only one fit to be our savior. And make no mistake, Grace Church, this Jesus who we worship is the only one fit to be the center of our story. He is the point of our true mythology. He is the only one who is worthy to be worshiped, the only one who can reveal to us right doctrine and right culture. The moment Jesus is not the center and the head of the cultural mythology of Grace Church, we should all pack up and go home and make this building back into a bowling alley.

Here is where we end this morning, in the face of Jesus. If I haven't been clear enough for you, let me try one last time. The book of Titus is going to teach us how to grow in health as a church. It will teach us right doctrine and right living. But we will never grow if we get the foundation wrong. If we start with a mythology, a shaping and guiding story, that is not the gospel story, then we will fall away.

The true mythology has been brewing since time began. Our triune God created the world for his own glory, and was not surprised when his chief creation fell into rebellion. Since Adam and Eve, he has been executing his true mythology, his gospel story, to perfection. He crafted a people for himself, to lavish his undeserving love and mercy on them, if they would turn from sin and trust him. And he sent his son Jesus Christ, fully God, as the apex of his mythology, the very center of it, to save all those who would lay down their pride and rebellion and simply have faith that he is capable to save them. Now all who repent and believe are welcomed into this people of God, the people of the true mythology, the people of the gospel.

And so thousands of years later, here we are in Waco, Tx. We are just like the Cretans—saved by the preaching of the word. We will believe what we study, we will become what we believe. So what will we do? Will we mistake, dilute, or substitute the knowledge of the truth with false cultural mythologies? Or will we resolve now to build this church with the first stone being the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Here is my application. My prayer is that this week you would work to identify any false cultural mythologies you are studying and believing. Identify them, and realize they are lying to you. Then my prayer is that you would remember you have been swept up in a grand story, a true mythology, saved by a God who never lies. Resolve then to believe this true story. In the next few weeks in Titus: study it. Study so that you may believe, and believe so that you may live. And come back next week—we will do that together.

Let's pray, church.