

The Gospel Is All We Have

Titus 2:11-15

Grace Church | 8.18.19

Announcements:

Crestview Book Club

Equipping Hour Classes

Good morning church. If you are not aware, we are continuing in our series on the book of Titus. Next week we will finish our time in Titus, and then we will have a short series on the mission and elements of the Church. I am excited for that—that will be a time where we pick apart everything we do: preaching, worship, baptism, communion, membership, mission mission, and try to ask the question “Why do we do what we do?” Is there a gospel reasoning for what makes up the structure and practice of our church? After that, we will spend the rest of the semester in the book of 2 Corinthians. So I am excited as to what the Lord has for us moving forward.

But let me remind where we last left off in Titus. Paul has been instructing Titus to teach the church in Crete how to become a healthy, godly, godly church. We saw Paul attempting, through Titus, to reorient their cultural mythology—to show the fact that God has revealed a gospel that changes everything. This gospel changes the way the church in Crete views their leadership, and it allows them to point out the false doctrine of the circumcision party, a doctrine that taught that the way to achieve salvation and godliness is by obeying certain ceremonial laws such as circumcision. And then in 2:1-10 we saw Paul instructing Titus on the nature of what accords with true doctrine: true doctrine creates a godly people who are counter-cultural in the way they mentor each other towards self-control. So that is where we left off—a clear command to “adorn the doctrine of God our savior”. If we can live and act in a way that showcases what we believe, we cause the doctrine of God to look beautiful and attractive.

But if we stopped there, we still don’t have the full picture. We have seen that the judaizers *do not* live a life that accords with right doctrine, and we’ve been instructed to live a self-controlled life that *does* accord with right doctrine, and we’ve seen the purpose of this life, namely to adorn our gospel doctrine. But we are still left with a problem. What is this doctrine? It’s not the doctrine of the judaizers, and it’s a doctrine that accords with a self-controlled godly life. But what is the content?

In our text today we will find the content of the doctrine we are to believe and adorn with our lives is the gospel. The gospel, in shorthand, is the good news of life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This, according to our text today, is what we are to believe. And not just believe, but cling to, because this doctrine—the gospel of Jesus Christ—is *the only doctrine* that has the power to save us, sanctify us, and glorify us. The gospel, we will learn this morning, is not just what we need, it’s all we have. It’s all we have for salvation, it’s all we have for godliness, and it’s all we have for

our future hope. Without it, we will never be saved from death, we will never be made holy enough to be with God, and we are most of all to be pitied, because we have no hope in the world. The gospel is all we have. It's not only the truth that redeems us from eternity separated from God, but it's the truth that gives us a full life of freedom and faithfulness here and now. This gospel is essential, necessary, sufficient, supreme, central. The gospel is all we have.

And let me be clear about this: for being a church that prides ourselves in preaching clearly and showing clearly the good news of Jesus, a claim like: "the gospel is all we have" is still not easy to believe. Saying that something outside of yourself is the only thing you need and have is an affirmation of humility. It's saying: I don't have the answer! It's saying, "look, Drake, when you preached on self-control and adorning the doctrine of God with our lives the other week, I struggled to put it into practice! You told me to be self-controlled, and I couldn't!". But today my hope is that by the time you walk out those doors you could echo with me in saying "I have nothing else save the gospel of Jesus. No merit, no excuse, no power, no strength, no salvation, no hope. The gospel is all I have."

So let's jump right in. The first thing I want you to see it **the gospel is all you have for salvation.**

The gospel is all you have for salvation.

Right after giving Titus a list of godly living to pursue, he switches gears in **verse 11**. Notice the first word there: *for. Because*. Adorn with your life the right doctrine of God, because the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people. Notice what he does not say. He does not say: "Adorn the right doctrine of God our savior, because by doing so you will be saved." He does not say, "adorn the right doctrine of God our savior, because if you do that, then grace will appear to you." No, he says, go and adorn right doctrine with right living, *because* the grace of God has appeared already, and brought salvation. The emphasis here is on a past event, a past epiphany—the grace of God has appeared already.

The interesting thing about this language for the Cretans is that it would have flown directly in the face of their cultural expectation of what the actions of deity was supposed to look like. In Crete, we have an interesting mix of culture. We have already acknowledged that the culture of Crete was not known for their moral uprightness—they are called "liars, evil beasts, gluttons". Their culture follows the ideals of their god, Zeus. In their lore, Zeus was just a man, but do to his benefactions to the people and kindness and ethical life, he achieved the status of god. He became deified by his actions. Once he was a god, however, he forsook his traditional Greek ethics and became known for his sexual immorality and lying—doing anything possible to get his way, lying and deceiving young Cretan women in order to sleep with them. So here we have a god who worked his way to become god, and then offered nothing once he got there.

Notice the difference already between Zeus and the God of the gospel described here. Zeus worked his way up to become a god, the God of the gospel worked his way down. The gospel of

Crete says: work your way to salvation. The true gospel says: salvation came to you. The gospel of Crete says: Zeus gave grace so that he might become god. He used you to get the freedom of deity. The true gospel says: God didn't need to give you grace to become God, he is and was and will always be completely free. But he gave it anyway.

Imagine the shock of new Cretan believers. This is a gospel foreign to their sensibilities. Here they have the good news of a God whose grace does not come from below, but from above. Before they heard this good news, they were trying, no doubt, to earn salvation in the same way. The idea that is presented in Cretan culture is that it is, in essence, possible to do the same thing Zeus did: work your way to glory. If you can achieve certain Greek "virtues", then you will truly achieve the good life, and then you can enjoy life as you please. In other words, if you get a few things down, you can then act like a god with complete freedom. You can achieve salvation from the drudge of the world's ethical standards by working your way up to get there.

The Cretans sought salvation by following the way of Zeus: get busy getting good, achieve deity, and get busy doing whatever you want. This is anti-gospel, seeking salvation from below. Let me give you a modern example of a doctrine of salvation that is anti-gospel: the doctrine of white nationalism. Our cultural moment is rife with this stuff. Think of the recent violence in El Paso. Innocent men and women gunned down as they shopped. Why? Because the shooter was convinced he was the agent of salvation. He was convinced that America needs salvation from the imminent threat of immigrants and those with non-white skin. I don't need to point out to you how evil this is. It's wicked. But this kind of action comes from a belief of a need for salvation from below. We are not far off.

Answer for yourself this question today: what do you feel as if you need saving from? For the Cretans, they needed saving from their lack of moral freedom. For the white nationalists, our country needs saving from the immigrants and intruders. For you, you might need saving from the boring drag of your career. You might need saving from the idea that you will never find or fulfill the vocation you want. You might need saving from the marriage that is crumbling, or maybe you simply feel like you need saving from the busyness of the season ahead of you. So what do we do when we find that we need saving? We craft a savior, and start working to make our salvation appear. Not only are we tempted to believe we can earn the grace of God by our actions, we also believe that there is some sort of salvation waiting for us that has not yet appeared. And we get to work, eager and zealous to see our self-created savior bring us what we really need. If we work hard at our career, the salvation of retirement is right around the corner. If we work hard in the classroom, the salvation of that prized job opportunity will appear. If we work hard enough in the gym and in the kitchen, the salvation of health and wellness will arise from within us. If we work hard enough to organize our schedule, our great lord and savior *vacation* will save us from drowning in our busyness.

If we are not careful, the fallenness of the world will draw us toward creating false saviors for problems that have already been conquered in Christ. And let me warn you—these saviors won't save. The grace they give you might feel good for a bit. For instance, it feels good when you make

your diet your savior and it gives you the grace of looking and feeling good. But this grace is ultimately empty. You conjured it up from below. Real grace comes from above.

Titus 2:11 is a verse screaming at us to wake up. It's the bullhorn crying out: the way of Zeus won't save you! The grace of the world will not save you! Church, we take the first step toward godliness and wholeness when we realize that salvation comes from above, and no where else. The gospel is all we have for salvation. Our problem is not our waist-line, nor is it our busyness or our disobedient children. Our problem is not economic or national collapse. We need saving from our *sinfulness*, our rebellion against God. We need saving, because if we are not saved from our sin, it will entice us with rotten grace and lead us blindly towards eternal destruction. We need the kind of grace that is eternal, heavenly, massively nondiscriminatory, divine, the kind of grace that saves not only our circumstances but our souls.

And friends, I am here today to tell you that this Grace has appeared. This is the gospel: Jesus Christ is the grace of God, undeserved, kind grace, plummeting to earth in incarnational humility. That night in Bethlehem, the grace of God shown like the sun. Salvation had come in the form of not of man become god, but God become man. You couldn't do it yourself, God did it. God initiated. He came to live perfectly, to die perfectly, to bear sin to death and to save all believing people, black and brown and white and otherwise.

The gospel is all you have for salvation. Stop believing anything except trusting in Christ will remedy any problem of this fallen world. Your essential oils will not make you full of grace, no matter how calming they feel. Your self-help books will not manifest salvation to you. Your kids success will not save you, your career accomplishments will not save you. Your mental health counselor will not save you. Even your surgeon may carve out the cancer from your body, but can never cut into the sin of your heart. Pardon me Mr. Lennon and Mr. McCartney while I step on your toes, but love is not all you need. The gospel is all you need. The gospel *alone*, the grace of God alone, saves us from sin, and so saves us from our anxious hearts, our failing marriages, our decaying bodies, and feelings of inadequacy. The grace of God has appeared from above. We didn't even ask for it. But it's here, and it looks like the person and work of Jesus. And it alone saves. The God-initiated gospel is all you have for salvation—stop looking elsewhere and believe that today.

The Gospel is All You Have For Godliness

In some sense, I think I can level with the circumcision party dudes. Remember them from a few weeks ago? Samuel preached that passage. These guys are seriously Jewish. For years and years, centuries even, their ancestors had been trying to please God. Just think about it for a moment: God makes this covenant with Abraham that is pretty straightforward. God says "I will bless you and multiply you into a great nation". Here's your part: obey me and set yourself apart by circumcision of all your males. I mean, I'm sure Abraham is weirded out just a bit, but the terms of the covenant are pretty clear. Circumcision is the way of upholding his end of the deal.

So new believers in Christ come to Jewish teachers in Crete asking away: how do I obey God? How do I become Godly? What should I do? It makes sense that the Jewish teachers, without a true understanding of the gospel, led them away and taught salvation by circumcision. Their problem was not that circumcision is inherently “anti-gospel”. Their problem is that they forgot to listen to what Jesus said about the pharisees, quoting Isaiah: “[These] people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men.” They tried to honor God with their practice of circumcision, but their hearts were far from him. So their circumcision ceased to become obedience to God and instead became an empty commandment taught by men.

So in verse 12 we see Paul’s doctrinal opposition to the circumcision party. Commandments made by men are the wrong teachers. The new believers in Crete were taught that circumcision would make them godly. What they should have been taught is that the gospel makes them godly. **Read verse 12.** The grace of God that has appeared *teaches* us to live godly lives in the present age. Godliness in the present age looks a lot like what we talked about in Titus 2:1-10, renounce worldly passion and living self-controlled. So not only is the past appearing of the gospel all you need for salvation, it is in fact all you need for godliness in the *present*. The gospel is your teacher for present-living. It’s all you’ve got, but it’s all you need.

How does the gospel *teach us*, or *train us* to be godly? I think the answer is found in **verse 14**. Here we find some gospel shorthand: Christ *gave himself* for us. This giving of himself is an echo of what Jesus says is his ultimate mission on earth we find in Mark 10:45: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Christ came to earth to serve by the giving of his life as a ransom. This word ransom in Mark 10 corresponds with the purpose of Christ’s giving up himself in Titus 2:14—he gave himself up for us to *redeem us from lawlessness*. The picture here, of ransom or redemption, is the idea that before Christ gave himself up, you were held captive by something and needed to be bought back from captivity. In this context, Titus says you were held captive by *lawlessness*. Lawlessness is a state of chaos, primarily due to disobedience or rebellion. The lawlessness of the world, then, is the chaotic nature of the world fallen into sin and rebellion. Mankind has disregarded God’s natural law in disobedience. When Adam and Eve fell, the world and the heart of men fell into lawlessness. You are naturally inclined towards rebellion and disobedience. You will never, and I mean never, achieve godliness on your own.

But here is the truth of the gospel in Titus: Christ died to buy you back from your state of rebellion. You were captive to sin and lawlessness, but he came as the law-fulfiller and law-obeyer in order to rescue you, redeem you from the clutches of sinful lawlessness. Here is simple gospel truth: you are only able to obey God because Jesus Christ redeemed you from your utter inability to. You were so ungodly and chained to sin that God himself had to live perfectly and die at the hands of sinners to buy you back. And he did.

This means that if you even one second you think you are capable of godliness on your own, you have lost the gospel. Christ alone has redeemed you from lawlessness—without him giving of

himself on the cross, you would be so enslaved to sin that every single thought and action of your continually would always be evil. Even the most humble humanitarian, without the gospel, is enslaved to sin and therefore cannot please God. You have not, cannot, and never will be godly apart from the gospel. Never chalk up any act of godliness you perform to anything less than the grace of God in the gospel. To attribute to yourself any act of godliness apart from the saving work of Christ is the first step to re-embracing the chains of sin that Christ freed you from.

The joy in believing this is that we remember the gospel tells us that the love of God in Christ is so powerful that he did purchase your redemption. He didn't leave you in your sin and lawlessness, utterly incapable of pulling yourself out. The grace of God appeared, he gave himself up unto death and suffering—for you, sinner. So that you would repent and believe and be *free* from the chains of sin. Our inability to do it ourselves is good news, because it shows us the love of God who accomplished this redemption on our behalf. This good news teaches you to be godly, because it ignites in you a desire to praise, honor, and glorify your savior. Without him, you were trapped. Because of him, you are free to be godly. The more you remind yourself of the redeeming work of Christ, the more you are training to renounce ungodliness which you are free from and to live a godly life now, in the present age. Remembering and rooting yourself in the gospel of Christ's redemption will make you zealous for good works that glorify your redeemer.

But he doesn't stop at buying you back. He also appeared to *purify you for his possession*. Not only is the gospel the only thing that can release you from your bondage to sin, it's the only thing that can fully purify you from sin.

My parents use to live on a lake outside of Austin. This was a really nice lake, and well taken care of. The dam continually let in and released water to make sure the lake was at a consistent level, never too empty or too full. Last year, a terrible rain storm hit central Texas, and flooded the lake beyond belief. The dam could not stop the rainwater from completely flooding the lake, destroying homes and boats and bridges. But eventually, once the rain subsided, the dam was fixed and the water level got back to normal. But just because the lake was regulated, it does not mean that it was clean. It was saved from the storm, but the aftermath of the storm remained. Debris was everywhere, mud and residue from the flood had to be dredged out. No one could boat on the lake for months.

This is like your life. Christ saves you from the flood of sin, shoring up your life eternally with his blood. In the instant you repent and believe, the deed is done: you are saved from any future flood of wrath, and you will be made clean from the aftermath of your previous sinfulness. That kind of promise of purity is so secure that some theologians call this "definitive sanctification".¹ The promise of your purity is so secure it is like it has already been completed. But in the same sense, your sanctification in the present world, although assured, is not yet complete. The debris of your

¹ I like John Murray's explanation the best, due to its clarity and Biblical precision. You can access an excerpt from *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2, here: <https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2011/definitive-and-progressive-sanctification/>

previous life of sin still exists in the lake. And the only way you can be clean is through the power of the gospel. Christ makes it so.

Christ himself gave himself up to death, not so that you could clean yourself up, but so that he could clean you up. Why? The text tells us—so that he could make you his own. The picture is of a bride being made ready for her wedding day. The groom is so full of love and concern for her purity, he ensures himself that she is made ready. This is Christ for you. From before time began, the goal of the gospel was that you would not only be saved from sin and released from its bondage, but that you would be made into the pure bride of Christ's own possession.

Ezekiel 36:24-28 24 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. 28 You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

The gospel isn't a redemption one-and-done. The gospel is a two-for-one deal. The goal of the gospel has always been that you would receive full redemption in Christ: that you would be made like God again—wholly holy, perfect, renewed, and swallowed up in Triune love forever. Christ came and died and rose so that you might, starting today and ito forever, be purified and like him so that you might belong to him.

The gospel is all you have for full godliness. This doesn't mean you are passive in your purity. No, the gospel, says verse 14, makes us *zealous* for good works. We are eager. Why? Because we know that Christ is for us and with us and in us. He alone has redeemed us—sin has no more power over us—and he alone purifies us. We trust him with everything. If we want to be godly, we lay aside our trust in any other method for godliness other than throwing ourselves passionately into pleasing Jesus Christ.

The text is clear to me. If you trust the work of Christ who gave himself for you, you will become zealous to please him. Your godliness will flow from an understanding of his love for you in the gospel. You will exercise self-control, because when in that moment you are tempted to burst out in anger against your spouse or roommate or child, you remember the love of God in Christ has redeemed you from your sin and has put his spirit within you in order to purify you for him. You are free, free not to sin and instead to chase after good works that glorify God and adorn the gospel.

Friends, the gospel is all you have for godliness. It is your fuel, always and continually.

The Gospel is All You Have For Hope

Read with me verse 13. Recently I was on Youtube, probably wasting time, and for some reason, a suggested video came up for me. The video was part of a series of videos called “I Shouldn’t Be Alive”. Basically, it was retelling the story of a guy who was lost at sea on a tiny lifeboat for something like 76 days, drifting in the ocean. Not sure why, but I think I watched all 45 minutes of this episode. Weird day. Anyway, something he kept saying over and over stuck with me. As they interviewed him, he kept saying “at that moment I lost all hope”, or “at that moment my hope was revived”. It was weird to me—his hope was so fragile. Small things, which were monumental for him, like catching a fish to eat, renewed his hope. His hope was that he would survive, and in his situation lost at sea, survival seemed unlikely. Hope was not easy to come by for him, it came floating by and gone again in an instant. But eventually his hope was fulfilled. He was saved. I have to think, that even when he was rescued, if he had greater hope in life, or less? Was being saved a glorious enough reality to satiate his hope that something better was out there?

For many of us, hope seems fleeting. Hope is not easy to come by, after all, when the days are as dark as the night. Many of you may not know this, but there have been several times in my short life where I have wrestled with a kind of melancholy that could possibly be described as depression. Those times when it seems my closest friend in the whole world is sadness. Maybe you’ve felt this before. The waves of emotion are uncontrollable, and ebb and flow seemingly at random without explanation, crashing against me like some great coastal cliffs. They say a pastor’s darkness is often recurring, that bearing the weight of the ministry of souls can take an emotional toll. I’m about two months into my pastoral ministry—and it has a been a joy, I am not complaining—but I can see how the darkness can creep in.

You see, I must confess I often place my hope in the approval of man. Even your approval, the approval of the church. Here I am, being very vulnerable. Preaching is exposure, for as I expose the word of God I must also expose my own heart. The health of your soul depends on it. I admit I often leave Sunday morning after preaching and think: “I hope I got my point across. I hope I didn’t bore anyone.” Now you where I can sinfully put my hope, even as I take the pulpit. Where might you put your hope in? Let me remind you, dear church: if it is not in the gospel, it’s far too dim to get you out of the darkness.

The promise of the gospel is a simple promise. It’s a promise of the past: the grace of God has appeared to save. It’s a promise of the present: the grace of God is purifying you. But it’s also a promise of the future: the grace of God will appear again. And when he appears, what does the text say? He appears in *glory*. Glory is a funny word to try to define. It’s best portrayed as a sum of all God’s attributes. If you could put God into one word, if you could open him up to peer into who he really is, glory is what you would find. An unmatched brightness.

Paul says that when Jesus comes back, he will display fully the glory of God. There will be an indescribable brightness that can’t be contained and will burst into the world with a full and living color. For some, it will be blinding. They will hate the light, because they weren’t expecting it, and with the light comes judgement of sin. But for others, the glory revealed in the second appearance of Jesus will be a glory long awaited. It will be the culmination of a blessed hope.

Here is all that I'm saying: do you hope for the revealing of the glory of God? Christian hope is not shallow. It's not a hope for a few more days on earth, or some extra spending money to spend on our kids. It's not a hope that we can survive being stranded at sea. Christian hope is the thought that maybe, someday, perhaps we can see glory. Maybe we can see Jesus face to face. Gospel hope is a hope that says: "I'm waiting to see Jesus." This is a blessed hope, because nothing else compares.

Church, there will be dark days. You will be tempted to hope in trivial things. But nothing but the gospel shows us a blessed hope. It tells us Jesus hasn't abandoned us, and he is coming back. If we place all our hope in Jesus, we aren't that let down when life is disappointing. We become more Godly, pointed healthily toward the future, waiting patiently. Our work has more meaning, when we can wait with blessed and assured hope. We can do it joyfully in every circumstance. And when we fail, we are not crushed. Our hope is bigger and brighter than our sin. It's gospel hope. The gospel is all we have for hope. It speaks a better word into the future, and sweetens every moment in between.

Leave Your Burdens At the Cross

Perhaps the greatest work of Christian literature is John Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress*. You know the story: a young traveler named Christian sets off on a journey to find the "Celestial City". The whole book is one big allegory. One of the most moving parts of the story is when Christian comes face to face with a cross and a sepulchre, or an empty tomb. Christian has been carrying to this point a very heavy burden that he cannot escape. But the burden cannot withstand the power of the moment:

"He ran thus till he came to a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a cross, and little below in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back; and began to tumble, and so continued to do so until it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more."

Shortly thereafter, Christian sang his song of deliverance: "Thus far did I come laden with my sin, nor could aught ease the grief that I was in, till I came hither. What a place is this! Must here be the beginning of my bliss? Must here the burden fall from off my back? Must here the strings that bound it to me, crack? Blessed cross! Blessed sepulchre! Blessed rather be the Man that there was put to shame for me."²

The song of Christian is the song of every Christian who has grasped the necessity of the gospel. "What a place is this! Must here be the beginning of my bliss?". Friends, you may have walked in here today with many burdens. You are looking for salvation in all the wrong places. You are trying

² John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*

to be godly but you are failing. You have lost all hope. You have nothing left. But take heart, you're in a good spot. Because here today I've tried to hand freely to you the only thing you need, and the only thing we have to give you.

When you walk out of these doors today, the world will tell you need a lot of things. For me, I think I need a nap. Maybe a haircut. But I'll also be told I need success. Or perfection. Maybe even fellow Christians will tell me I need to be better. And I probably do. But really, there's only one thing I need. There's only one thing that will save me, one thing that will make me godly, one thing that will never let me down. Only one thing that will get that burden off my back. It's the gospel. The good news of Jesus is all I need. The cross and the empty tomb. And it's all I have.

So Paul's last instructions in our text? **Verse 15**. Get going, and declare these things. Don't let anyone discourage you. You have it on good authority, the gospel is all you have, and so it's the only thing you give. Leave your burdens here, at the cross, and leave full of good news for sinners.