

# Why Should You Pursue Godliness?

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**Bible Verse:** Titus 2:11-14  
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Well, our text this morning comes from the book of Titus 2, and I invite you to turn there with me. I'm going to read our text for this morning and then set the broader context for it. Titus 2:11 through 14. As we have the privilege of coming under grace this morning through the word of God, Titus 2:11 through 14.

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

There's an obvious emphasis on godliness and righteousness in this text. You look at verse 12, you see the admonition to live sensibly, righteously, godly in the present age, that in verse 14, Christ died in order to purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good deeds, and as we come to this text, it's important to realize and to remember the fullness of what we've looked at over the prior five weeks or so in our teaching of God's word. Paul in the Scriptures have already defined for us what that godliness is and what the righteousness is of which he is speaking, and now here in verses 11 to 14, he is expanding on the theme of grace to help us fulfill what has already been taught to us as what the will of God is. In other words, to state it differently, we're not left to kind of speculate in our own minds about what God is asking from us, what God is calling us to, what God is commanding us in this passage, what the purposes of grace are to accomplish, that's already been set forth for us in the prior context. And I want to read those prior 10 verses with those thoughts in mind, because it is just so practical and it is so plainly stated in the text what it is that the godliness, what the righteousness, what the good deeds are that God is speaking of in our primary text for today. And so in Titus 2:1, he speaks to Titus, he speaks by extension to those that would be in spiritual leadership, and he says,

1 ...as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.

And then he goes on and addresses older men, older women, younger women, young men in the congregation, verses 2 and following. He says,

2 Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. 3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, 4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. 6 Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; 7 in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, 8 sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us. 9 Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

Beloved, here's the thing and it's so helpful, it's so practical, and it's so contrary to some of the things that that are put upon us about, you know, living life, doing hard things and trying to, you know, do all kinds of stuff; what this passage is describing is the practical aspects of living a quiet, godly life and the routine of daily life, and having attitudes and conduct that is reflective of what God desires. There's a character aspect to it, there's an inward aspect to it, as the grace of God works in our hearts, and that's important to see. In older men, verse 2 there, to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith. There's a character aspect to it and then yet there is also clear instruction in terms of the way that we structure our lives and what we devote ourselves to with our priorities. As the older women see that that their role in the church, their responsibility is to have a godly influence on the younger women and the younger women see that their primary role established by God is in the home. Looking there at verse 4, giving themselves over to loving their husbands and loving their children, working at home, being subject to their own husbands so that the word of God will not be dishonored. And for young men, seeing that there is to be a sensible sound approach to life that is being cultivated day by day in response to the grace of God in your lives. So this is the thing to see, this is the godliness, these are the good deeds of which Paul is speaking when he puts the grace of God into operation here in verses 11 to 14. And so the grace of God has a particular goal in producing Christian character and Christian virtue of a particular kind that has already been defined for us earlier in the chapter.

Now this is not that which draws attention from the world, this is not anything that gets applauded by the world. Frankly, it's something that is at a discount in the evangelical Church today, this kind of quiet godly living, developing Christian virtue in your character, focusing on a home life, focusing on being a godly person in the workplace. This is not something that attracts headlines but what you and I need to see is we need to look beyond what the world applauds, what the world values, what the world esteems, and have our minds and have our hearts transformed by grace, transformed so that our

priorities, our aspirations, our affections are shaped by the Holy Spirit in response to the grace of God in our lives. Now someone might say, someone may be new to biblical teaching, someone new to the faith or even standing outside of Christ and looking in, I want to kind of shape the rest of our time here together with a question to ask you and to ask of the text because the text itself asks this question: why should you pursue that kind of life? Why should you seek to live in a godly manner like this as it is laid out? Why would you deny yourself? Why would you deny the world? Why would you come out of the world and all of its ambition? Why would you? Let me say that again, I like the way that came out: why would you deny the world and come out from all of its ambition in order to live a life like this, the pursuit of quiet godliness, a developing internal character and godliness, and the fruit of the Holy Spirit being manifested in your life working out in these practical ways that do not lead to glory in an earthly sense, that do not attract the praise of man, and may not necessarily even be that which makes you wealthy or prosperous in an earthly sense? Why would you live that way? Why would you give up patterns of behavior that you find pleasurable even, that you've spent your life doing, to do something like this? Why would you do that? Why should you pursue this kind of godliness? Why should we live godly lives?

What I want you to see, beloved, is that today's text, verses 11 to 14, are answering that question for you, and it is not appealing to your self-interest as it does so. It is not promising you wealth and prosperity as it does so. It is not promising you particular contentment even in a day-to-day basis. It's not appealing to what it's going to do for you in the call of God for this kind of godliness in your life. Why should you live a godly life? Let's look at our text again and notice the opening word of verse 11 where it says, "For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men." That word "For" introduces the reason why you pursue this kind of life. This is why you do it. It is related to the operation of the grace of God in your life. It has nothing to do with with horizontal worldly approval. It is all about the grace of God. The word "For" connects what those prior 10 verses with what now follows in the following four verses. It is the hinge upon which everything else turns. The prior 10 verses calling us to this kind of godliness pivot on the grace of God. This is what God desires. This is what God has been working out for a very long time even prior to your existence on earth.

Now, this word "grace" indicates God's free favor to us in Christ. God has shown favor to us. He has shown kindness to us that we did not deserve. Where you and I deserved judgment, God instead gave us something good instead. He gave us blessing. He gave us mercy. He gave us patience. He gave us Christ ultimately. Where you and I deserved judgment, God came and brought Christ to us and because God has been so good to us, so radically changing our future destination, so radically changing our very constitution, so radically giving us the fullness of Christ without cost as Scripture says, come freely to the waters and drink, because God has done that for us, and he has delivered us from sin and judgment and the bondage of Satan, because he's been so good to rescue us of his own initiative just out of the sheer kindness and goodness of his own heart, God saved you, that grace therefore becomes the reason upon which you base the rest of your life, and the reason that you orient your life no matter what the past has been like, you orient the rest of your life toward pursuing this kind of character.

Listen, beloved, we would not have known grace unless God had revealed it to us. This realm of grace is not something that is attainable by the intellectual exploits of the natural man. You and I, we could not have seen grace because we were blind to it. Satan had blinded us, 2 Corinthians 4 says. Our own hearts and our own love for sin had blinded us to grace and biased us against the goodness of God, biased us against his great name, biased us against the goodness and the fullness of Christ. We were biased against everything good in God by the evil that was in our heart and that was operating against us and enslaving us there in the spiritual realm from Satan and all of his demons. We were blind. We couldn't see it. We were deaf. We had no capacity to hear it on our own. And beloved, we could not have earned it because we were lost, and a sinful life, a sinful heart cannot produce a single good work to merit God, to merit Christ. You can't do a single good work to earn the forgiveness of a single sin that you've committed and, beloved, we've all committed millions of them. There was such guilt, there was such bondage, there was such rebellion in our hearts. Read Romans 3 If you have any question about that. We were lost and grace came to us and opened our eyes, and enabled our hearts and gave power to our hearts and opened our ears to hear the gospel, turned our disposition against God, God graciously gave you a new heart that was disposed to respond to him, and as you cried out to Christ in response to the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart, beloved, God graciously saved you, changed you, and the Spirit came to indwell you, gave you joy and peace and forgiveness of sin and made you an heir of eternal life and an heir and a co-heir with Christ of all of the riches of God. Beloved, that's why we respond to this, that's why we look at this and say yes, it's because this is what the purpose of grace is to achieve.

Now, when it says that the grace of God has appeared, look at it there in verse 11, "the grace of God has appeared," it creates the picture of the early lights of dawn hitting the dark black sky of night. Grace has appeared, light has arisen in the coming of Christ, and as a result of that things have changed. And this grace is manifested to us in the person of Christ, in the work of Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection. And so when Paul says in verse 11, "the grace of God has appeared," he's taking a summary look, a capsule statement about the entire life as a completed whole. Christ came bringing salvation to all men. God looked at, so to speak, I say so to speak because this was his eternal plan before the foundation of time, God looked into the wicked world, as it were, and he sent his Son. He sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. This is incalculable, immeasurable grace, kindness, goodness, favor, mercy, that God would do that for the human race. He could have written us all off. He could have condemned us all and started it all over. But rather than doing that, he showed favor to mankind instead and Christ came bringing salvation to all men. What it means by that is that in the Old Testament, the primary focus was on the Jews and on the nation of Israel. When Christ came, there was an opening up of an understanding that the gospel was intended for non-Jews as well. Not just Jews, but now Gentiles, those who had no physical connection to Abraham or to David. Now the gospel was opened up to people like us.

There are probably very few Jews in the audience today and I just want to give you a perspective of how much the grace of God means to us. Look over at Ephesians 2:11, and

we'll probably also look at chapter 4. Paul says in Ephesians 2:11, "Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh," in other words, those of you who had no Jewish heritage whatsoever, he goes on, and he says, "you're called the uncircumcision by the so-called circumcision, which is performed in the flesh by human hands." He says, "remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." He says you had absolutely no promise upon which you could approach God. You were not party to the covenants that God made with the Jewish people, and therefore you were separate from it. The promises that God made to them did not apply to you. You were apart from it all and as a result of that, you had no hope and you were without God in the world. You were doomed and in your natural state there was absolutely nothing you could do to help yourself. You were utterly lost. It is so sad to think about the awfulness of that terrible condition.

Look over at chapter 4 of Ephesians in verse 17. He says, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." This is the state of Gentiles, totally utterly lost.

Paul says, "But you did not learn Christ in this way," going back to chapter 2, verse 13, "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." You were in a distant galaxy from the presence of God. You had no means of approaching him and God, as it were, reached across all of the galaxies of space, touched you, brought you to himself with grace, and now has changed all of that so that what was formerly true about you, being blind and deaf, being separate from God, having no hope in the world, those things that were formerly true about you are no longer true. Now you can see if you are in Christ, if you are a Christian. Now you can hear the word of God. Now you have a heart of flesh that can respond. Now you have a new nature from him. Now you are in the covenant of redemption. Now God has showered his love and mercy upon you. Whereas once you were an enemy, now God has loved you in Christ.

That's grace, beloved. That is immeasurable unconquerable grace and we, now turning back to Titus 2 to stay up with me in the text here, "the grace of God has appeared," verse 11, "bringing salvation to all men." Let me just pause and make one statement about that. Salvation is offered freely to all men. Everyone in this room is offered Jesus Christ as your Savior. God comes through his word and every one of you are presented with the opportunity and the offer to come to Christ, promise that if you will come to him your sins will be forgiven and you will receive eternal life and that you will enter into fellowship with God that can never be broken, and he will break the power of sin in your life, he will rescue you from damnation, and he will freely, gladly and lovingly receive you to himself at the end of your human life. That's offered to everyone. Salvation is offered to all men, and so what we do as a church, what we do as individual Christians is we tell men that freely. We preach the gospel freely to all men without distinction, and

we trust that God will use our words to work in their hearts and to save some of them to the uttermost. There is only one way of salvation and that is in Jesus Christ but that one way is offered to everyone to whom the gospel comes.

And so if you are a human being, beloved, God graciously offers the gospel to you. You can believe in Christ and be saved today right now, permanently knowing an instant justification by which all of your sins are immediately pardoned in Christ, God immediately receives you and accepts you as righteous in his sight. That's the glory of the gospel. You can be saved today in Christ and for those of us that are in him, then, the purpose of grace is shown in the outworking of it. And what we're going to see, we're going to see three aspects of the purpose of grace, the purpose of God. God had a purpose in all of this and this purpose wasn't a sudden thought that he had in his mind. To us, from our human perspective, there came a point where we repented, where we turned to Christ, but God's purpose was at work long before that and working deeply in it, and what Paul shows us is that the grace of God is multifaceted in our lives, and we draw upon that multifaceted grace in order to further the purposes of God in our lives, to have that kind of grace transform our hearts that we would live as he calls us to do. And what we see is we see the present purpose of God in grace, we see the future purpose of God in grace and we see the past purpose of God in grace, and we want to look at these one by one.

Let's first of all look at the present purpose of God in our salvation. So, as you look at your Christian life, as you contemplate yourself as a man or a woman in Christ now, you should understand that you've been saved by grace, you've been saved by grace through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, Ephesians 2:8 and 9. Understand that grace goes beyond that, understand that the grace that came to you in that moment of your repentance, the grace that came to you in that moment of repentance is now operating to achieve other purposes as well. The grace that saved you from sin, from Satan, and from judgment, the grace of God, the purpose of God that saved you at the start is now instructing you how to live, how God intends for you to live now that you are a Christian.

Look at verse 12. It's a very long sentence that we're reading here in these four verses. The grace of God has appeared, and in verse 12, what is that grace doing? That grace is active. That grace is purposeful. That grace is a living force in our lives and it intends to accomplish something that God desires in you. And what is that? Verse 12 it's "instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age." Now Paul has already called us to manifest godliness in those first 10 verses. What he's doing now is he's repeating that emphasis. Beloved, what you need to understand is that true grace, true salvation never leaves a man unchanged. There is no such thing as a true Christian living an unchanged life after his supposed conversion. The idea of a carnal Christian is where a man just lives in an unbroken pattern of sin but is still a Christian, that is a falsehood. That is not true. There is no comfort in a one-time profession of faith that did not lead to a change in life. That is not because we must work in order to keep our salvation, beloved, as some people maliciously distort the true teaching of Scripture in order to confuse the issue. No, it's not

because we work to keep our salvation, beloved, it's all related to grace. It's all related to the purposes of God and what God intends to do. When he saves a man, when he saves a woman, he's doing something. He's doing something beyond a moment in time. He has taken a life and made it his own, and the grace that saved us is now conforming us to what God wants us to be. That's true salvation. That's biblical salvation. The grace that saved us has an instructing influence upon the way that we live now.

And to just state it simply, we're only looking at this passage in very much an overview manner here today. There's a negative and a positive aspect to this grace in the present purposes of God and to state it simply, look there at verse 12. We'll just let the text instruct us. It instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires. Grace has come to you and said recognize the sinful desires that were at work in your heart before your salvation, recognize the temptations that are in the world, recognize the lusts of your flesh, the lust of your eyes, the boastful pride of life and deny it all. Declare yourself dead to it. God saved you that you would die to that sin and that you would no longer pursue it, that you would no longer embrace it, in other words, you would forsake it completely and utterly. As a settled principle and commitment in your heart, you say, "I no longer live for the things that I used to live for in my unsaved state. My desire for worldly acclaim, for worldly wealth, my desires for the worldly fulfillment of every sinful desire in my flesh, I'm dead to that. That old man has died. The grace of God has come to me. I have been made a new creation and I reckon myself as dead to what I used to be and I am now alive to the purposes of God." You deny it in that sense.

Paul, here is not addressing the fact that we still struggle and fight against the remnants of sin and struggle against temptation, that's not what he's addressing in this passage here. What he's addressing here is a fundamental mindset that says, "I'm dead to the world and I'm dead to my old man and I'm glad that I am." It's a mindset. You're being instructed by grace to recognize that the former manner of life that you pursued has been slain in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's so true being slain in the Spirit. The truth is that the old man is slain, not that someone foolishly falls down under the influence of manipulation on a platform in front of an arena full of people and call that being slain in the Spirit. No, the Spirit slays the old man, slays the old man in your heart and makes you alive to different purposes of God. And so you forsake that, you forsake the worldly priorities and then in a positive way, grace points you to this sensible kind of living and godliness that Paul has just been describing in the prior 10 verses.

So you die to the old man, you're alive to the new man, and the new man is instructed by God and gladly receives and conforms life to what God wants you to be. You see, beloved, and here's the thing, here's another thing, not just the thing because I'm saying a lot of things: the true Christian, the one that's genuinely been born again, the one where grace is truly at work in the heart, the true Christian is receptive to that, the true Christian desires that, the true Christian wants to live a life that pleases the God that showed them such grace. The true Christian delights in obedience. The true Christian grieves when sin crops up in his or her life because righteousness is now pleasing, it's desirable, it's attractive, it's a reason to live. That's what grace does. Grace from a righteous God makes a man, makes a woman desiring after righteousness. The grace and righteousness that

saved us is appealing to us to become the defining principle in our lives. That's the point. Can you imagine the foolishness of God saving someone and leaving them in sin, leaving them in a life of rebellion against him? Why would he do that? That cannot possibly be the outcome of true salvation, and it means that as we grow in our Christian lives, we're ever mindful of putting sin to death and not embracing it and clutching it to our hearts.

Now let me go and state this from a couple of different points. Beloved, your assurance of your salvation grows as you understand the perfection of the work of Christ at the cross on your behalf, that in Christ all of your sins have been forgiven, that he has shared his righteousness with you and you now have bold and confident access to the throne of God. You understand that, you believe that, that is at the core defining definition of true faith is that you believe that about Christ. In addition to that, your assurance grows and develops as you see an abiding desire for godliness in your life. You see this principle at work. You see that you have new desires. You really don't want the world. You do want the things of God. You do desire the knowledge of Christ. You love his word. You understand it. You read it. You desire to be with the people of God. New things have come. Well, beloved, understand that those are the marks of grace at work in your life.

Now let me quickly say this in that context: the struggle that you and I still have against sin, the fact that we sometimes are dealing with besetting sins, the fact that we resist them but we still stumble in many ways, beloved, let me encourage you with this, that struggle against sin – oh and how I said that is so important to grasp – that struggle against sin, resisting it, mourning it, is not a sign that you are unsaved. It is not a reason to think that you are not in grace because you're still struggling with sin. Beloved, let the word of God, let the grace of God minister to your aching heavy heart this morning, that abiding effort in your life to resist sin and to grow in grace is a certain sign that you are saved. I'll say it again: the abiding effort to resist sin and grow in grace is a certain sign that you are saved. It's a sign that grace is operating in your life, cleansing you, changing you, making you different. The fact that you no longer desire, the fact that you hate the sins that you once loved and clutched close to your chest, the fact that you see it all differently Paul said as a mature apostle in Romans 7, "Things I want to do, I don't do. Things I don't want to do, I do say." He said, "I find there's a principle of evil that's in me, the one who desires to do good." And so, beloved, what Paul is talking about here in Titus 2:12 is not somebody who's attained perfection or someone that never stumbles. No, he's talking about grace being at work instructing you in your weakness, giving you strength, giving you power, giving you an assurance of the ongoing purpose of God, and drawing upon that grace and the power of the Holy Spirit giving you the strength and the ability to go forward and to grow still more in grace.

It's wonderful to think about. You know, look, I just, you know, especially as I'm preaching there's something about preaching to the same congregation, the same people month after month, year after year after year. There's something about that that's very special, that's unique from conference ministry and all of that. This is what God has appointed as the primary means of the grace through the word in your life is the weekly proclamation, the regular proclamation in a local church. One of the things that I've just continually become more mindful of and as I do that here in life, is that I know that

you're just like me. I know that you have times where you stumble and you're not what you would want to be. I know that there are times where bad attitudes crop up in your heart, things come out of your mouth that you regret, you do things and you look back and say, "Why did I ever do that? What is wrong with me?" Struggle in relationships maybe. Beloved, what I want you to see is that the God who was so gracious to save you in the first place is still gracious today as you pursue godliness in this life. The Lord knew when he saved you, he knew that you would not be perfect in this life. He knew that in advance and he saved you anyway and that can give you such comfort, that can give you such comfort when you find, you look and you say, "Here I am. I'm on the ground. I've stumbled again." Beloved, the grace that so wondrously saved you at the first is still available and still receives you graciously when you come and confess your sins and say, "God, I've sinned again. Be gracious to me again."

Beloved, you cannot possibly exhaust the grace of God. You cannot possibly exhaust this magnificent grace that brought salvation to all men. You can't exhaust the grace that instructs you and assumes that you're having to deny ungodliness and worldly desires, that you wrestle with that. It assumes that so that you and I as we walk through life together, realize that we have a gracious God who is favorably disposed to us. He saved us in the initial instance, his grace is operating now. That's a blessed place to be. It's a blessed place to be and sometimes the refreshment your heart needs is not in trying and being told to try harder and being exhorted to do this or that more and more. Just come back to the grace of God that saved you in the first place, beloved, and realize how tender and how merciful that grace is on your unworthy soul. And don't reject it but rather embrace it and let it cause you to love him all the more in response.

And so we see grace, the present purpose of grace of God, the grace of God in our lives, but there's more to it than just that, more than just what God is trying to accomplish and at what the sanctifying grace of God is in your life right now. That grace in the present, it promotes our sanctification. "It is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure," Philippians 2. But beloved, let's move beyond that, shall we, and understand this: that this pursuit of godliness, we pursue this godliness because of the grace of God that's at work in our lives, but understand, think about it this way, just think of your life as being bracketed by the time before your birth and the time after your death. We live in a window of time that's very brief comparatively and grace during that window of time, grace is operating to sanctify us. Well, what I want you to understand is that that pursuit of godliness during those 70 years give or take of our lives, is bracketed by something amazing, something that is remarkable and says, far, far more about grace than what we have already said here today, infinitely more than what we've said just already. What we've already said is too wonderful for words. What we've said already could not be exhausted if we preached 100 messages on this topic. But there's so much more. Your pursuit of ethical living, Christian virtue, beloved, is bracketed on the other sides of your birth and death. It is bracketed by the two comings of Christ, the two comings of Christ. Salvation, God's grace in salvation utterly transcends the 70 years of your life. And we see that as we keep reading on in the text. We've seen the present purpose of grace, verse 12. Now we get the blessed privilege of peering into the future purpose of grace, point number 2: the future purpose of grace, of God's grace.

As we are pursuing sanctification in response to the grace of God, there is something transcendent that we are anticipating, that we are waiting for. Verse 13, "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." Paul has just infused, the Bible has just infused our pursuit of godliness in this life with an utterly wonderful concept, an utterly wonderful promise that there is so much more in Christ for us than what is happening right now because what Christ has promised to his people is that while he is in heaven now, one day he is going to come back for us, one day he is going to appear. He appeared in his first coming in humility, in the humiliation of Bethlehem, in the humiliation of his earthly life, living gladly as a man walking on earth but walking humbly in a humble state, identifying with us in real humanity. And Scripture said he had no earthly form by which we should be attracted to him. But, beloved, when he comes again, he comes a second time, it's not going to be like that. When he comes in a second time, when he comes to this next time, it's going to be of great great glory, of power, of a display of Shekinah might. That's what that's going to be like, and for those who belong to him, that is going to be a blessed time, that is going to be a further manifestation of the favor of God upon us.

What is that going to look like? What is the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior going to be like? Now look at Acts 1. Acts 1. You see, whatever happens to us in this life, however, our fortunes may rise and fall, however prosperity or people may come or go in our lives, beloved, there is one thing that is fixed and certain for sure, more certain than death and taxes even, and that is the return of Christ. In Acts 1, trying to decide where to start just before his ascension in verse 6, Acts 1:6, the disciples had come together and they were asking Christ, saying, "'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.'" Beloved, don't go after people who are trying to set dates for the return of Christ. That's not for you to know. How clear can Scripture be about that? As soon as someone starts talking like that, just walk away. Ignore it. Don't let it trouble you. Christ will come at the time appointed by the Father and it's not for us to know what that time is.

He says, verse 8, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." The Spirit came in Acts 2 and fulfilled that, but keep reading and we get an insight into what the return of Christ is going to be like, a preview of the entire book of Revelation. Acts 1:9, "after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." Beloved, mark this: in their presence with their physical vision, they saw Jesus lifted up into heaven and into the sky and the clouds received him. What's the second coming of Christ, what's his return going to be like? Somehow, in a way that I won't pretend to try to describe, it's going to be just like that. It's going to be a visible appearance where he returns and we know that. He will descend out of heaven in glory, in earth-changing, history-ending glory. He will appear like that and we know that because if we keep reading, we see what Scripture says.

Verse 10, "as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come,' future coming, another time Jesus will come, his second coming will come, "in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." You watched him go up into the sky, into the clouds and be received. In the same way, when he comes again and he will come again, it will be, somehow it will be just like that.

That's the future purpose of God and when he comes, beloved, we're going to look at a few texts here, when he comes for us, and we're not going to get into all of the complexities of eschatological systems here, we just know it's sufficient to say for today that Jesus Christ is going to return, he is returning for his people and his people will see him in glory. That is our blessed hope that Christ will appear, our great God, our great Savior Christ Jesus is coming in glory and we will see him. And everything about this, this wretched planet, all of the difficulties of life, all of the struggles with sin and sorrow, and all of the goodbyes that we've said to loved ones in the past, all of that sorrow is going to be slain when Christ comes and receives us to himself and we are with him. You see, beloved, Scripture says that Jesus Christ is coming again. Our Lord who saved us, our Lord, who sacrificed himself on the cross and gave himself over to the degradation of that wretched instrument of execution, that one who was buried, that one who was gloriously resurrected, who ascended into heaven, he's coming back and he has a purpose of grace to fulfill for his people when he does.

That is the immutable purpose of God for the future, Christ will come just as visibly as he came the first time and here's the beauty of it all, beloved, here's the beauty of it: right now we are being swept up by the word of God as the Spirit works through the word, we are being swept up into heaven itself. Do not miss the spiritual significance of the themes that Scripture is bringing to us today. What we live for ultimately is we are living for that day when Christ returns. That is the day that is most blessed to us. That is what we rest our hope on. We don't base our hope on anything in this world, on any man, woman, boy or girl in this world, on any political outcome, on anything that happens in culture, on anything that happens in our jobs or anything else. We don't put our hope in any of that. We can't. It's all too fragile. It's all going away.

What we hope for is the certain reality that Christ is coming back. When the Bible uses the word "hope," it's not talking about a hope where you superstitiously cross your fingers and say, "I hope this is going to happen." Hope in Scripture is a confident certain expectation that what God has promised he will do. "I believe the promise of God," you say to yourself. "God has promised that Christ will come back and I hope in that. I'm certain of it. That's what I live for." There's nothing else worth living for, beloved. There isn't anything else that's worth living for not ultimately, and so what we see as we contemplate this is that we're looking for our hope, what our deepest desire is for the return of Christ, not anything that we hope for in this world.

What it tells us is this, what it wonderfully tells us is this, and by the way, you know, I've preached a lot of funerals over the years and sometimes, you know, you preach on that

hope, especially when you're preaching a Christian funeral. You preach on this hope. You're not there in the pulpit at a funeral to extol the virtues of the dead. You're there to proclaim the gospel to the living and to proclaim hope to the people of God. Remember your hope. This death, this casket in front of us is not the end, and what all of this means, it's so blessed and precious if you're in Christ, is that as wonderful as it is to be a Christian today, we have not yet begun to receive the fullness of our salvation. We've received a tiny morsel. We've received so much in Christ, and we have all of Christ, there is nothing more of him to receive, we have all of the Spirit and there is nothing more of him to receive, but the outworking of our salvation, the fullness of the blessings have only begun. The fullness is going to be seen when Christ comes back and we reign with him in glory. That future grace is coming. That is the grace of God. That is the purpose of God that motivates us and instructs us to live as the first 10 verses taught us to live. We can be content with a quiet, unremarkable life from a human perspective because we know that there is a remarkable future that is ahead that we are patiently waiting on for God to bring in his own time, and that future grace, that grace that is to be added to what we already know promotes godly living.

Let me remind you of a small handful of passages here to make the connection of the return of Christ, the blessing that will be for us, and how it motivates us to live a godly life. John 14, turn there with me, please. Verse 1, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." Beloved, take it on the inerrant, infallible, impeccable word of Jesus Christ who makes a promise and keeps it, it is impossible for him to lie to us. He cannot lie. It is contrary to his nature. He would never lie to us. He would never mislead us, and he makes these promises to comfort us and to give us grace to help us persevere until the fulfillment of what he says. Look at it there in verse 3, Christian. This is his promise to you. Put your name in the page if you must. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." Christ expressing his purpose of grace to one day bring you to himself. Christ expressing his purpose of love for you, that having redeemed you, he longs for that ultimate fulfillment of fellowship with you. He wants you to be with him in his presence that you might see his glory and bask more and more, and adore him more and more that the presence of his visible glory would be the great joy of your heart beyond anything that you or I have known in the present life. He's coming again. That's the purpose of God.

1 John 3. 1 John 3, and to just see the love and grace mingled together, the promises mingled together along with the implications of what it means for us today. 1 John 3 says, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God." Stop for a moment and see exactly the same thing that we're discussing here today, the exact same principles here in 1 John 3 is what we're expounding in Titus 2, the present purposes and the future purposes of God. Now we are children of God and it has not appeared as yet what we will be, future purpose of God. It hasn't been manifested to us yet but we know that when he appears,

the future purpose of God is this: we will be like him because we will see him just as he is. We will see the resurrected glorious face of Christ and when we see that it will somehow change us so that we share in his glory, and the wretchedness of this present body, the wretchedness of this present existence, and the wretchedness of dealing with sin and temptation and disappointment and sorrows and tears and rejection, all of that is going to be gone and forgotten and all we are going to know is the greatness of the glory of Christ and that we are sharing in it with him and that we belong there. Beloved, when that moment comes, it's not going to be an alien moment to us where we feel like we're out of place. This is going to be the ultimate fulfillment of home. This is where we belong in Christ. This is what he saved us for. This is the eternal purpose of God to one day conform us perfectly to the image of his Son and to share in his glory throughout all of the endless unfolding ages of eternity. It's the future purpose of God.

When my mind, when the Spirit of God brings our minds into this realm, I don't want to leave. It's too glorious to walk away from and yet Scripture instructs us that the future grace has a present impact on our lives. Look at verse 3. He says, "everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." Beloved, I read recently something that I've seen so many times people say. It's a wretched statement that is used to marginalize our hope and to undermine our trust in Christ, and you've all heard it. You've heard people say that, you know, he's too heavenly minded to be any earthly good. That's a wretched statement, and you should never speak that way, and you should never let anyone speak to you that way. How could we ever be too heavenly minded? How could we ever have our hope fixed too much on the coming of Christ? How could we ever over-desire and overvalue what God has stored up for those who believe in Christ? How could we ever make too much of that? How could we ever think too much of that? That's infinitely wonderful. And Scripture says that as we're mindful of that, it'll have its earthly effect. We will purify our lives. We'll grow in grace now. There's a balance to it.

One final thing from Titus 2. I know time's gone long, but who cares? It's just a clock. We're taking an hour to discuss what we're going to enjoy for all of eternity. There's not enough time to contemplate that. We've seen the present purpose of God, verse 12, deny ungodliness, live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age. We see the future purpose of God, Christ is coming again. And now Paul wraps it up by considering the past purpose of God. He so seamlessly goes from what Christ is going to do in the future to what he has done in the past. Notice how he immediately switches to a past tense in verse 14 as he discusses the past purpose of God. "Christ Jesus," end of verse 13, "who." This relative clause is expanding on the person and work of Christ. Christ Jesus, who did something. Who, what did he do in the past before you and I were born? He "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Christ when he died on the cross, he accomplished a twin purpose in his sacrifice for us. We've already talked about it today, so I don't need to expand on it again here. In a negative sense, when Christ died for us, he purchased us out of our slavery to sin. He redeemed us. He bought us out of sin and delivered us from the spiritual bondage in which we were, and those of you who are not saved are still existing in. He saved us in a negative sense by bringing us out of the

slavery to sin and notice, beloved, notice, beloved, and reinforcing what I was saying earlier talking about our ongoing struggles with sin today, that when he gave himself for us, he did it to redeem us from every lawless deed. Every lawless deed. The worst of you, the worst that you have done, the worst that you have thought, the worst evil that dwells in you in a remnant sense. And beloved, it's evil. It's sinful. It's wretched. I get that. Understand that when Christ laid his life down on the cross, that he was making a comprehensive payment, he was making a comprehensive redemption to deliver you from it all, to deliver you from all of the power and all of the guilt of it.

Every lawless deed. Beloved, your precious Savior, your precious Savior when he suffered and shed his blood on the cross., he knew your every sin in advance and he gladly, willingly, courageously covered it with his blood so that you would be released from the penalty of it so that God would never hold it against you ever again. Every lawless deed has been redeemed but, beloved, there was also a positive dimension to his saving work. He didn't simply erase sin, he took us as his own people. Verse 14, "to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." He didn't just die for you and leave you as an orphan wandering about on the street, dirty, vulnerable. He didn't do that. He brought you into the family of God is what he did so that he you would belong to him. "I am His and He is mine." And he did that to purify us, to own us, and to have us serve him. Oh, the work of Christ. Oh, the glory of Christ in his first coming dying in humiliation, in his future coming in glory to purify us, own us, and to have us serve him.

So beloved, let's circle back and bring this plane in for a landing after a long flight. Why should you pursue godliness? It's because it's the purpose of God in your life. God's grace is at work in you to change you now. God's grace in Christ redeemed you at the cross in the past, and God's grace in the future will complete your salvation, glorify and change you and make you conform to the image of Christ where you will be with him forever and there will be no more tears, no more sorrow, no more death, no more pain, just the fullness of dwelling and luxuriating in the glory of Christ, and marveling throughout all of eternity that such a great one as that loves such a one as me. To conform your life to the principles of Titus 2 shows gratitude for his grace. To reject it, to reject the revealed will of God is an unthinkable sin against grace, isn't it? May the Spirit guide you all to honor the glorious Son to the glory of his Father who sent him in love for the redemption of our souls.

Let's pray together.

*Gracious God, thank You for your precious word and Your precious Son. Purify us for Your own possession, make us zealous for the good deeds of Your word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*