

HOW DID GOD OUR SAVIOR SAVE US

(Reflecting on Regeneration, Renewal by the Holy Spirit, and our Hope of Eternal Life)

Titus 3: 4-7 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

The story I am going to tell you is true. Many of you know the story. Yet, I must remind you of this story to begin this message on how God our Savior saves us. During the Great Depression, a Missouri man, John Griffith, was the controller of a huge railroad drawbridge across the Mississippi River. One summer day in 1937, he took his son, Greg, eight years old, with him to work. At noon, John Griffith put the bridge up, to allow ships to pass under it, and he sat down with his son on the observation deck to eat lunch with him. Time passed quickly. Suddenly John was startled to attention by the shrieking of a train whistle off in the distance. Looking at his watch, he noticed it was 1:07 PM. The whistle came from the Memphis Express that was on time with its 400 passengers on board. The Memphis Express was roaring toward the raised bridge. John Griffith leaped from the observation deck and ran to the control tower. Just before throwing the master lever, he glanced down for any ships below. Then a sight caught his eye that made his heart leap into his throat. His son, Greg had slipped from the observation deck and fallen into the massive gears that operated the bridge. His left leg was caught in the cogs of the two main gears! Desperately, John's mind whirled to devise a rescue plan. But as soon as he thought of a possibility, he knew there was no way it could be done.

With alarming closeness now, the train whistle shrieked in the air. John could hear the clicking of the locomotive wheels over the tracks. That was his son down there--yet there were 400 passengers on the train. John knew what he must do, so he buried his head in his left arm and pushed the master switch forward. The massive bridge lowered quickly into place just before the Memphis Express roared across the river. When John Griffith lifted his head, his face smeared with tears, his eyes followed the passing windows of the train. Businessmen were casually reading their afternoon papers, well dressed ladies were in the dining car sipping coffee, and children with long spoons, were eating ice cream. No one looked at the control house. No one looked at the great gear box. With wrenching agony, John Griffith cried out at the steel train: "I sacrificed my son for you people! Don't you care?" The train rushed by, but no one heard this broken-hearted father's sobbing words.

In an infinitely greater way, God the Father sacrificed His one and only begotten Son, so that we as fallen men, women, boys, and girls, could be rescued from sin, death, and eternal hell. Billions of people around the world have carelessly paid no attention to the Gospel, nor have they received Jesus as their Savior after Calvary, God's ultimate expression of Divine Love. God in heaven, must cry, "I sacrificed My only begotten Son for you! Is it nothing to you who pass by? Will you look away and act as if Jesus' death came at no cost to Him, or to His blessed Father? The context of our text today in Titus 3: 4-7 found in verse 3 states, "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another." Against this dark background, shines God's love in the Gospel that is

described in a two-fold way as God's goodness and God's love for mankind. We read in verse 4, "But when the goodness and lovingkindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us..." The Greek word for kindness is an exclusively Pauline word—**chrestotes**. This word means (1) **the gentle goodness and the gentle grace of God. Chrestotes** means the disposition of God toward sinful mankind—a disposition of desiring to be gracious, favorable, kind, healthful, helpful—never severe, malignant, or violent. The second word used in verse 4, is **philanthropia**. This word (2) **means the divine fondness and courteous kindness of God for man**. This word goes beyond a general or generic love for mankind at large. It is normally used of God's love for individuals in our deepest distress. The introduction of these two divine words of gentle divine grace and kind divine love for each of us, introduces for us today, one of the grandest declarations of the Good News, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in all the Scriptures.

Verses 5-7 have often been spoken by commentators as an ancient Christian hymn. Most historians believe this hymn was sung as believers stepped down for baptism into baptismal waters. In other words, these words of Paul to Titus were originally a dusting off, of the bases of what we believe. Today, I want us to look at three aspects of this glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul calls us to these three important looks of the Gospel—a look backward in remembrance, a look inward in reflection, and a look forward in readiness to meet the Lord. Those three compelling looks ought to make the Gospel glorious for us all today as we rededicate our lives to Jesus in light of His death, burial, and resurrection. Let's take a close look backward, inward, and forward.

THE GOSPEL CALLS US TO LOOK BACKWARD IN REMEMBERING.

(I.) When God's grace and love appeared, verse 5 says, "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." This look, backward, in remembrance and in retrospect. points us straight back to Calvary. It points us back to the moment when we received the Lord Jesus as our Savior. It points back to when we were forgiven by the Lord and in His mercy, He did not hold our sins against us. Every born again, forgiven sinner is saved. Notice, v. 5 "He saved us." This look backward, is to help us remember where our sins once were, and where they are now, under the blood. One time Augustine was speaking with a man who kept mourning gloomily about his sins. Augustine jolted him to attention saying, "Man, look away from your sins and look to God. It is not that we are to forget that we were saved. No, all our days, we should live in a continual and lifelong repentance and a repentant sorrow for our sins—not just our past sins, but those sins when we fall as believers. Nevertheless, the memory of Christ's forgiveness should move us to glorious joy and wonder at the forgiving mercy of God.

One hymnwriter, Robert Harkness, put it well in his hymn, "Why Should He Love Me So? He wrote, "Love sent my Savior to die in my stead. Why should He love me so? Meekly to Calvary's cross He was led. Why should He love me so? Nails pierced His hands and His feet for my sin. Why should He love me so? He suffered

sore my salvation to win. Why should He love me so? O how He agonized there in my place! Why should He love me so? Nothing withholding my sin to efface; Why should He love me so? Why should He love me so? 2X Why should my Savior to Calvary go? Why should He love me so? That hymn based on this ancient baptismal hymn, ought to spur us on to this glorious look backwards in remembering what Jesus did when according to His mercy, He saved us.

Notice verse 5, that this salvation was “not on the basis of works done by us, in righteousness.” Isaiah 64:6 tells us, “all our righteous deeds are like a filthy, polluted rag or garment. I remember around a family gathering at Thanksgiving time that Jinny shared last, and she wisely reminded us all that we were all just “trash” with nothing in us to merit God’s love or grace. Maybe you don’t like to think your life before salvation was all just like a filthy grease rag, but let’s get it in our heads, beloved. We have no merit of our own. Salvation never comes by human effort. It is God Himself who brought about our salvation according to His mercy. Notice, verse 5—salvation is all of God’s mercy. Never tire of testifying to this amazing truth. Even after salvation, if we brag on our works, it’s all so much filthy rags of arrogant pride.

This retrospective looking backward in remembering, introduces two big theological words: (1) **the washing of regeneration** and (2) **the renewing by the Holy Spirit**. Now the washing of regeneration is thought by some church groups to be baptismal regeneration. They say that baptismal waters are the means, by which the blood of Jesus is applied. Those people speak of the baptistery, the lake or the river as what, how, and where their sins were washed away. But the washing is not by means of the receptacle holding the water or the blessed water of baptism. The term regeneration referring to individuals occurs only this one time in the New Testament. The Greek word is **palingenesia**. **Palin** means **again** and **genesia** means born or birth. This is where we get the idea of new birth, or being born again as Jesus spoke to Nicodemus in John 3.

This being born again is of the Holy Spirit-v. 5 The third person of the Godhead is often represented as the bestower of life—spiritual life. The Holy Spirit takes the lead in making us holy. This regeneration is a one-time act of God the Holy Spirit, who baptizes us into the family of God. This points to the time and the act of the Holy Spirit entering us. It is the spiritual act that water baptism pictures. But this **one-time act of the Spirit, when He justifies us**, gives rise to the life-long activity of the Holy Spirit which is called by Peter, His renewing. **Being born again is instantaneous, a radical change, while being renewed is a continual process which we call sanctification**. The Greek word for renewing is **anakainosis**. It means the daily renovation of our mind, and soul and spirit that Paul speaks of in Romans 12:1,2. This renewing points not to the act of the Holy Spirit coming in, but the quality of life He brought to us when He came to abide in us. Life before Jesus was a worn out life and run down. Spiritually, we were dead in our trespasses and sins. (Ephesians 2: 1) When we come to Christ, we discover that this act of renewal is not over and done with, in one moment of time. No, it is a lifelong

renewal, a daily renewing every day for the believer from the day we are born again until the day we see Christ. Paul wants us to look back in remembrance and in retrospect to what the Holy Spirit did completely and what He is doing daily, all which we did not merit. That's the look backward in remembering. Secondly,

THE GOSPEL CALLS US TO LOOK INWARD IN REFLECTION. (II.)

Notice verse 6, speaking of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote to Titus saying, "Whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." When we as believers examine ourselves within, we see in our own lives what the Holy Spirit has poured into us when He poured out Himself to us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. We know that the Holy Spirit historically, was poured out upon Christ's church at Pentecost. Once poured out on the church, the Holy Spirit stays within His church, that's us. Having once established His personal residence in our hearts individually and corporately as the Church, by faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit does not leave us. He does not leave His church for our bodies are the very temple of the Holy Spirit. (I Corinthians 6: 19) Notice the Holy Spirit poured into us richly through Jesus.

This adverb, **richly**, **plousios** speaks of the rich supply of spiritual gifts, that result from this outpouring of the Spirit in our individual lives. None of us can rightly say, "I can do nothing in the kingdom for the Lord. We cannot say, "God has given me nothing." No, we all possess spiritual gifts. All of us through Jesus Christ, through His atoning sacrifice and by His prayer that the Holy Spirit would come to us, have lives full of His gifts. Look inward; be honest. What has the Holy Spirit given you? In John 14:16, Jesus said, "And I will pray the Father/ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, a Comforter, that He may abide with you/be with you forever." Look inwardly in reflection and thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word for "**poured out on us**" is **ekcheo**. This word means to gush out or spill out or pour out on us. When Jesus spilled His blood for us at Calvary, this atoning sacrifice opened up a new and living way for Jesus, by His Holy Spirit to gush out on us and to pour out and pour forth upon us more than we could ever ask or think. An apologetic Christian who keeps telling others he is without gifts or without talents, just a humble saint, who is without abilities, is a person hiding behind either a false humility or a false reality. Beloved, today—look inwardly in reflection. Can you see what Jesus has done inside you by His Holy Spirit? Can you remember when this pouring out work of the Holy Spirit was done in you? Beloved, this pouring out I am convinced, by the Word is not a one-time pouring out, but a continual for all time pouring out. This pouring out becomes an appetite for the Lord, that makes us long for more and more of Jesus. As we yield to Him, the Holy Spirit pours out more and more of Jesus, filling our cups to overflowing daily. But in this reflection and introspection, look for new appetites that the Holy Spirit has given you that are not only present, but growing. Remember, that we are saved from old appetites that were killing us. Back then, we didn't have the Lord pouring out His gifts to us. All we had back then was the pouring out of our lives to death, with an insatiable, unsatisfied craving to fulfill our own passions. Maybe you are old enough to remember on Paul Harvey, years ago, a unforgettable story.

Paul Harvey's story illustrates what we must not continue to have in us running the show in our lives, our all-consuming and self-destructive nature of sin. Paul Harvey's story is about how Eskimos harvest wolves. First, the Eskimo coats his knife blade with animal blood and allows it to freeze. Then he adds another layer of blood, and lets it freeze and then another and another until the blade of this razor-sharp knife is completely concealed with frozen blood. Next the Eskimo hunter fixes his knife in the ground with the blade up. When a wolf follows his sensitive nose to the source of the scent of blood, he discovers the bait, licks it, tasting the fresh frozen blood. He begins to lick faster and faster, now more and more vigorously, lapping the blood until the keen edge of the knife is bare. Feverishly now, harder, and harder the wolf licks the blade in the arctic night. So great becomes his craving for blood that the wolf does not notice the razor-sharp sting of the naked blade on his own tongue. He doesn't recognize the instant at which his insatiable thirst for blood, is now being satisfied by his own warm blood. His carnivorous appetite just craves more—until dawn finds him dead in the snow. Beloved, we are saved from our sinful appetites which slowly but surely bleed us to death until Jesus saves us and heals us and gives us an appetite for more and more of Himself, when He pours out to us by His Holy Spirit. Thirdly,

THE GOSPEL CALLS US TO LOOK FORWARD IN READINESS. (III.)

What readiness is this? It is Gospel readiness we all need today; the readiness Gospel believers have, to meet the Lord. We read in verse 7, "So that being justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." The point of this forward look on our eternal life is one. No one, outside of being justified by God's grace, can ever hope for an eternal inheritance with Jesus. This is Paul's teaching throughout the Bible. In Galatians 3:11, 29, Paul wrote, "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "the righteous shall live by faith..." "And if you belong to Christ, or are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." Justification leads to inheritance. If there is no justification by faith in you, then there is no eternal inheritance for you. The Gospel is not just looking backward in remembering, looking inward in reflection, but looking forward in readiness for Christ's return.

A born-again girl in elementary school was challenged in her faith by her unbelieving teacher. He asked her if she really believed all those stories in the Bible about a man named Noah who built an ark and survived a world-wide flood. The little girl said she believed the story was true. She added, "As a matter of fact, when I get to heaven, I am going to ask Noah about how it all happened." Her teacher questioned her, "When you get to heaven, what if Noah isn't there?" The little girl responded, "Well then, you can ask him all about it." Beloved, there is an after-life, it's either in heaven or hell. Heaven is a place of eternal happiness with the Lord. Hell is a place of never-ending conscious punishment, separated from God forever. It's a simple message today, but oh how much we need to answer the Gospel call (1) to look backward in remembering, (2) to look inward in reflection, and to look forward in readiness to meet the Lord. We all need all three looks. Backward, inward, and forward—do you have all three? Let's bow our heads.