

Titus 1

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Bible Text: Titus 1:1

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Please be seated. We're looking today (starting to look) at the book of Titus. Whenever we get through Titus, we will move on to Ephesians, just so you can know what will be happening over the next 5 or 6 years of your life. So you might think: well, how long can it take to get through Titus? Well, today we will be looking at chapter one verse one. So if you're in a hurry, I'm sorry. Titus 1:1. I will read the first 4 verses just to give you some hope that we will eventually get through them. Hear the Word of the Lord to us. "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth which leads to godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began, and has in due time revealed His word through preaching, with which I was entrusted according to the command of God our Savior, To Titus, my own son in the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior." The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

When you come to a passage like this, no matter how slowly you move through it, you can feel like you're moving too quickly. I mean, there are 10 or 12 months worth of material in Paul's salutation. I won't do that to you, but there is a lot that Paul packs in here and we'll see in coming weeks why he says what he says and how he says it, as he begins this letter that is to Titus. But remember, these letters would be read to the whole congregation. And so there is no one in Titus's church there on Crete that would not hear what Paul was saying about him-- that Paul would be saying about himself, about Titus, about Titus's ministry, about how things should be going there in the church. I want to encourage you today in this: that the Lord worked in and through Paul as he does in ALL of His children. Now, I want you to extrapolate that to understand that the Lord can and will work in and through YOU in ministering the gospel to others. I always appreciate the apostolic levelers. We see it in this opening of this letter: "To Titus, my own son in the common faith..." The apostles never positioned themselves in a place of superiority when it came to the gospel. Now, they'd pull out the apostle card. You know, you read the letters of John and "just wait till dad comes home." There are those moments. There are those moments, but when it comes saving faith, when it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the apostles consider themselves in the group, just one of the commoners, as it came to that faith. Well, we see two things in this opening verse that I hope to expound well before we come to the table today. We see Paul's position and we see Paul's priority. Paul's position was one showing that God was working IN Paul. So often when (particularly I think this is true of those of the masculine persuasion) that when we're asked about ourselves, what do we tend to go to first is what we do. Some get uncomfortable talking about who they are, what their experiences are. We consider that too effeminate, po-- too, possibly, emotional. "This is what I do, I accomplish great things in the work force. I accomplish great things for the world." Well, Paul begins by telling us about how God had worked IN him. "Paul, a servant of God..." This- this is a more general description of him. He was a δοῦλος, a bondservant of

the master. He would be faithful to the death. And then we see this more specific denotation that he wasn't just a servant of God in a general way, he was an apostle of Jesus Christ. He was a messenger, an angel, as it were, a New Testament prophet. As- as we look at the book of Acts, we see the amazing testimony of the apostle Paul. We see how he was a hater and we know haters gonna hate and that's what Paul did. He hated the church, he was rabid against the people of the Way. He hated those who claimed to follow this rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth. Did they not know how unfaithful they were being to the true faith, to the one God, the God in all of His unity? But then Paul, as by one born at the wrong time (as he puts it in First Corinthians 15), Jesus visits him on the road to Damascus. He wasn't on his way to retreat to think about what he had been doing. He wasn't on vacation so that he could get away from the pressures of killing Christians for awhile. It takes a lot outta you. He was on his way to go house to house in Damascus and drag Christians from their homes and slaughter them in the streets and Jesus shows up. Let us take hope, brothers and sisters in those for whom we are praying. We see them spinning, perhaps into greater and greater wickedness in their life and we begin to believe the lie that they need to get nice before they can get saved. They need to get clean before they can be redeemed. Now, if God can hunt down a murderous Jew on his way to persecute the body of Christ, He can hunt down your spouse, He can hunt down your child, He can hunt down your boss. Keep praying. Keep praying.

Jesus didn't wait till Paul was ready to give him a new heart. Jesus didn't wait till Paul invited Him in. Jesus didn't wait till Paul was at a Billy Graham crusade and walked the aisle and prayed the prayer and signed the card. Jesus showed up when Jesus chose to show up and He saved him. And having been sent by the Lord, Paul then wandered throughout the known world, a good chunk of it, and his wanderings had taken him through Crete, and he began the work there, and he left Titus as the local parson in charge. And now Paul is giving him and, ultimately, the congregation there, instruction on the life of the church by way of this letter. So we see clearly God's working IN Paul. If you knew Paul before his conversion and after his conversion, you would say, "God is working in him." And brothers and sisters, in the covenant community, our goal is to have non-dramatic conversions. We don't want our children to wander off into drug dealing and prostitution and extortion and gambling. We don't want them to wander off into these things so that they can have a really dramatic conversion story. I mean, in my own life, it was a month before my fourth birthday. At that age I was not saved out of a life of the grand obvious sins, but it- it does not change the fact that we are redeemed from massive, life destroying sin. God is working in us, brothers and sisters. He is changing us. He is making us new. And that was Paul's priority as God worked THROUGH Paul. See, God never just saves us as an end in itself. From the very first telling of the gospel, it became obvious that others outside of US would be involved in the situation, eventually. And God saves us to be ambassadors for Him. If we reach a position where we say, "well, it's us four, no more, lock the door." P-please, just shut the doors, don't let anybody else in. You can either stay out or come in, if you want. Everyone is going to turn around now and see who- "oh, who is that back there?" Okay, we're all in, we're all good, we're okay. We don't need to take the gospel outside of these walls. Friends, that is the equation for death in the church because Christ will take His light from us if we do not shine His light brightly to the dying world around us. And that's not just true for me, it's true for you. ALL of us are called to be ambassadors for the living Savior. So Paul's priority was to see the very things that have been going on in HIM happen in other people. To preach Christ so that others might be saved. He's a servant of God, an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect. And the foundation of our faith is not our choice, is not our desire, is not the will of man, but the will of God. The foundation of our faith is God's eternal election of those whom He chose to send His saving love upon. In the Confession of Faith chapter 3 paragraph 5 we read, "Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any

foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto: and all to the praise of His glorious grace." And some say, "but that's unfair that God would just choose some." Okay, let's make it fair. YOU have to measure up. Go ahead, be fit, on your own, to be in the presence of an infinitely, eternally holy and perfect God. Go ahead, live in the fairness that will damn you to hell. If God did not choose to save men and women and boys and girls and to predestinate them to salvation, there would be no hope. How could we EVER become a worthy on our own? How could we EVER figure it out without His Word, without the preaching of that Word, without the Spirit applying that Word? How could we ever make it to heaven on our own?

Romans 9 verses 10 through 15 say, "Not only that, but Rebekah also had conceived by one man, our father Isaac. For before the children had been born, having done neither evil nor good, so that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but through Him who calls, it was said to her, 'The elder shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.' What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'" Let it be clear, brothers and sisters, the Lord shows mercy and compassion. It is not up to us to decide where and when and upon whom He shows it. He decides that. But know that we love and serve and live in a merciful and compassionate God, that if it weren't for His decree, neither Jacob nor Esau would make it, neither of them would "according to the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth..." Yes, God's eternal decree establishes the secondary causes by which His divine will is worked out. Romans 10 [vs 11-13]: "For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes in Him will not be ashamed.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is generous toward all who call upon Him. For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" So the question comes: well, how does this process play out then? [vs 14-15] "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring good news of good things!'" Brothers and sisters, God's election does not negate the preaching of the Word, the hearing of the Word, the responding to the Word. It establishes it as the means by which the elect come to Christ and are brought to Him. "According to the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth which leads to godliness..."

Now, every once in awhile I have to throw out some fancy words so that you know I do my job. This is pointing toward the *ordo salutis*. That's Latin for the order of salvation, the series of events and chain reactions once God begins that work in the life of a person that leads to salvation. In other words, this is going somewhere, and as we live our lives day to day, and we come up against the same besetting sins, and we deal with the same people, and we have the same attitude, and it seems like we can never change, and it seems like we are defeated, and we are downcast, remember that the gospel is taking us somewhere, it is taking us toward godliness. The Shorter Catechism handles this well by pointing out the basics of this order of salvation, beginning with effectual calling [Q 31] which is the work of God's Spirit which convinces us of our sin and misery, enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renews our wills, He persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel. And then it asks: [Q 32] what are the-- "what benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life? They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, sanctification, and the several benefits which, in this life, do either accompany or flow from them." So then it answers: what is justification? What is, then, adoption? What is sanctification? What are these benefits? And it answers this from this life and at our death and at our resurrection. Friends, we are being taken to a godliness that we cannot even fathom at this point in our lives because this is not just

the godliness of next week or next year or next decade or on our death bed, this is that eternal godliness where the saints of God are perfected in His presence forever.

Ephesians 5 [vs 25-33], "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, and that He might present to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. In this way men ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord cares for His church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh.' This is a great mystery, but I am speaking about Christ and the church." Brides, you remember that day. I don't mean to-- really? You remember that day, Mary? Alright. Operating in the prophetic, here? Well, one of us is going to be getting married soon. And every bride longs to wake up in that physical perfection. The dress is perfectly white. There is no spot or blemish. The hair is perfectly done (for those who have hair to do). They want to stand in perfection for their husband. And brothers and sisters, when it comes to our Christian experience, we are the teenager that wakes up every day with acne all over, greasy hair that can't be tamed, we spilled stuff all over our outfit. That's who we are on our own and yet Christ, our husband, works in us perfection, to present to Himself, on that day, a perfect, beautiful bride.

We read about this in Revelation. Chapter 21 [vs 1-8] says, "Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth.' For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no more sea. I, John, saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven, saying, "Look! The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them. They shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. There shall be no more death.' Neither shall there be any more sorrow nor crying nor pain, for the former things have passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, 'Look! I am making all things new.' Then He said to me, 'Write, for these words are faithful and true.' He said, 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the spring of the water of life to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the abominable, the murderers, the sexually immoral, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars shall have their portion in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. This is the second death.'"

Brothers and sisters, the glory of the gospel is that Christ takes those from that second list and He, because of nothing they have done, nothing deserving of that moment, nothing that makes God say, "well, now I have to do this," He takes them from that second list and He plops them into that gloriously perfected bride and makes them ready for an eternity with Him. This was Paul's priority, to declare these things. Tucked away in that section of the book of Revelation is one little line. It's-- everything's kind of out here in the glorious and the splendorous, then there's one little line tucked away in there: and there shall be no more curse. We can see beautiful things in this life. We might like to go out to the Rockies, maybe that's the beauty that strikes you, or- or the Appalachian Mountains, some great and beautiful places there. We can even see the fruits of the works of- of the hands of men in- in beautiful structures and buildings, both historic and new and modern. We can-- we can appreciate beauty, but all of the beauty that we have ever appreciated in this life is in the light of the fall, the curse. It's imperfect, it gets broken, it fades, it dilapidates, it needs repair, it needs renovation, it needs fixed up. Brothers and sisters, there is coming a day where we will stand before Jesus Christ as a perfected bride, the gospel having come-- having come to its fullest fruition in us, in that ultimate godliness for us. And there will be no more curse, there will be no more sin, there will be no more hindrance in our

walk with our Master and Lord. And Paul was faithful to declare, as John did in Revelation 22 [vs 17], "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' Let him who hears say, 'Come.' Let him who is thirsty come. Let him who desires take the water of life freely." Brothers and sisters, that is the call of the Lord today as we come to His table. "Come." Christ is working in us and He is working through us. As we come to the table, He is declaring to us His death and we are declaring to one another His death. He is working in us and He is working through us to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Stand with me as we pray.