

The Purposes of God in Your Pursuit of Godliness

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I would invite you to turn to Titus chapter 2 as we continue this study of the inspired Word of the living God. We finished last month, in the past four weeks or so, looking at the first 10 verses of Titus chapter 2. And as we explain God's Word verse-by-verse, we were struck by the fact that Paul here in this letter to Titus addresses different segments of the church. He talks to older men and calls them to dignity in life and maturity in faith in verse 2. In verse 3, he calls the older women to be reverent in their behavior, to be a godly model to the younger women. He calls the younger women to be workers at home, to model godliness in their private, personal relationships with their husband and with their families. In verse 6, he urges young men to be sensible. In verse 9, he urges bond slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to be well pleasing and not argumentative. And as you study that you're mindful of something, if you're thinking at all: you're mindful that this is instruction that cuts against the grain of what culture and society would have us to be. It would have us to be those who are assertive, and demanding our rights, and disregarding the Word of God in the supposed name of liberty and liberation. And the Bible cuts against all of that. The question is, why should we do that? What is the basis of this? Why should we pursue this kind of godliness that is self-denying, self-sacrificial, and is geared toward a realm that is different from the environment in which we live? Why should we pay attention to that? Well, Paul in the passage that we're about to explain goes into that and explains it. And you must understand, if you're going to live a productive, useful Christian life, if you are going to rise above the environment that weighs us down like gravity from living this way, you must understand the reasons that God calls us to live this way. And the theology that undergirds those commands is profound and it's what we're going to see in verses 11 to 14 here this morning and probably next week as well.

Look at chapter 2 verse 11 as we come to our text for this morning. Why is it that you should live a godly life as expressed in the teaching that had just gone before in chapter 2? Paul explains it in verse 11. He gives us the internal motivation for all of it when he says in verse 11,

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.

We pursue godliness because God's purposes are at work. That is absolutely essential to understanding and having a proper approach to living the Christian life. If you are a Christian, God has laid His hand on you by name. He has declared that you will belong to Him. Christ made that possible. Christ actually guaranteed the certainty of that result by His atoning work on the cross of Calvary. He wasn't simply being an example when He bled on the cross. He was actively procuring and purchasing your soul for His possession for all of eternity. And so, there are these great transcendent purposes that are at work that were set in motion long before you were ever born. Long before five generations of ancestors of yours were ever born, God had eternal purposes that He set in motion in time, and now as you live life here on earth, you are entering into the stream of an outworking of purposes from eternity to eternity. That's what this passage is telling us.

And here's what I want you to see, beloved. Here's kind of the introductory import of that: as you look at those basic instructions on Christian living in the first 10 verses of chapter 2, it would seem to be wrapped up in kind of the mundane details. It's talking about daily domestic life, and daily work in the employment realm and just the whole way of sensibility in the way that you live. We must understand, you must understand, what undergirds that instruction. Being a Christian energizes the details of your daily life with vast eternal significance. Those details are the platform. They are the stage upon which you live out what God has appointed for you. It is of eternal significance, because it is an eternal God who has procured an eternal salvation for you through the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. All of that is the working out of an eternal purpose of God in your life, and you must see it from that perspective. We do these things on a daily basis, not simply to go through some motion. We do it because it is what God has purposed. It is the platform that He has given you by which to honor Him.

The life that you now have, you must understand this, you must understand this: the life that you now have, in all of its physical dimensions, in all of its financial dimensions, in all of the trials and the joys and everything that make up the texture of your entire life, that life is the life that God has specifically designed for you to be the means by which you would glorify the Christ of your salvation. It is all designed. It is all purposeful, and He gave you your life, not someone else's. And that is the life that you are to embrace, to take charge of, to glorify Him, and the theology that underlies that is what we see in verses 11 to 14. And as we move into this passage, I want you to understand something and embrace it: God intends you to understand His purposes and to have them change your life. We are meant to go and to grow from one level of glory to another. We are to continually be more conformed to the image of Christ, continually more engrossed in the purposes of God than in the things of this world, and you should be able to look at your life and to see that you are increasingly thinking about, increasingly in love with, increasingly pursuing, the things of God, and not so worked up about what's happening in the daily world around you. If you are utterly consumed by daily problems, and daily

politics, and all of that, you need to come to recognize that God has something different for you. His purposes are different than that and you need to give your heart over to them.

He did not save us to simply leave us unchanged in this world. This passage makes it very clear. This is designed to change your life, and the way that that happens is that you place your life, you think about your life in a much greater context than most of us are accustomed to think. We're not used to thinking this way, and it's why we need the Word of God to help us think rightly, so that we could live rightly in the brief window of time that God has given us before He calls us to our eternal reward. And so, Paul, having instructed different segments about the church, grounds that instruction now in good theology. We're going to treat this passage in an overview fashion. There's so much packed into this, and I wrestled a little bit with how to present it. I want you to see a really big picture of this passage, and I was afraid that if we delved into too many details right at the start that that would get lost in it. We need to see the big picture. We need to see the panorama. We need to see the whole mountain range of the glory of this. And so, I want to see the big picture before we tackle the details.

Look at verse 11 with me. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men." That word "for" is really crucial for you to understand. As you've seen the instruction that applies to your life from verses 1 through 10, this word "for" is the bridge between verses 10 and what follows through verse 14. It is the bridge that connects them. It's the foundation that underlies the superstructure of your life. Paul is about to state the theological reason for the ethical commands that he just gave. It connects the prior verses with what immediately follows, and so for example, if you're a younger woman and you see the instruction that says, "Young women love your husbands and love your children," it doesn't stop there. This passage is telling you, and I'm just using this by way of illustration, this passage is telling you, "Young women love your husbands and love your children, if you have them, for, because, for this reason, understand why I'm telling you," and then that's what follows. When Paul says, "Young men be sensible," it's not simply a command to be sensible. It's be sensible because of what I'm about to say.

And so, you must make the connection between what came before that we studied in the past month with what we're about to look at. This is why we live this way. "For the grace of God has appeared," which implies, which is in an intrinsic reminder of the fact, that you were dead in trespasses and sins. You were lost in darkness. You were enslaved by the devil. You were on a road to eternal destruction, every one of you and me included. We were all bound to sin. We were in slavery to sin. We were in darkness. We were lost. We were utterly lost as we pursued our own ways and pursued the things of this world. And something happened, if you're Christian. Something happened to you. The grace of God broke into your life. Somehow, God brought the Gospel to you and saved you and redeemed you and changed you and delivered you from that awful place of risk and destruction that was the reality of your life. God has intervened and saved you and changed everything. And so, you live differently as a result of the great grace of God that has broken into your life.

When Paul talks about grace here, "For the grace of God has appeared," he's speaking of God's free favor, God's undeserved favor, that He showed to you in saving you in the Lord Jesus Christ. You had no claim on God. None. You had forfeited any right, any claim, upon the goodness and favor of God. You were a rebel against him. You were indifferent to His Word. You didn't care. If you prayed at all, it was for selfish reasons, not for the glory of God. Everything about your life was selfish and sinful. Even the good things that you did you were doing for the wrong reasons, and you were under judgment as a result of that. Now, you must understand that if you have been saved from that and delivered from that, there must be a responsive gratitude, a responsive thanksgiving, a responsive submission to the One who so graciously showed favor to you when He had every right to judge you. You must view it from that big perspective, if we're ever going to get anywhere in the Christian life. Grace is God's free favor shown to you in Jesus Christ in your salvation.

It says, "It appeared." Look: you and I would not have known grace unless God had shown it to us, unless God revealed it. We could not have seen it, for we were blind. We could not have earned it, because we were spiritually bankrupt. We could not have found it, because we were lost. And so, the grace of God has appeared. God took the initiative to show favor to you. Look at verse 11 with me. When Paul says that the grace of God has appeared, it has the picture of the first rays of dawn hitting the black sky of night. It's the appearance of light upon a dark stage. When the grace of God has appeared, it's ultimately referring to the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the grace of God. God appeared in grace with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you can see that he's referring to Christ, because as he goes on in verse 13, I want you to see this. I just want you to see the big picture. I want you to see that I'm not making this up. This is all right here in the text. The grace of God has appeared. What does he start to talk about? In verse 13, he talks about Christ Jesus. In verse 14, he talks about Christ giving Himself to redeem us from every lawless deed. It is the dawning of Christ that was the appearing of the grace of God in a visible way.

And so, going back to verse 11, when he says, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men," here's what he means by that: the Jews were accustomed to thinking as though they were the unique chosen people of God, which had Old Testament roots, but when Christ came, He made it plain that He was bringing salvation to all men, not just to Jews. He wasn't a racial Savior. He was a Savior of the human race. Christ is offered to every manner of man, Jew and Gentile, slave and free. There is no one that is outside of the call of the Gospel in Jesus Christ. If you are a human being here today, man or woman, boy or girl, the Gospel is offered to you. Jesus Christ comes to you and calls you and says, "You are dead in your sin. I'm calling you to come to me for salvation." He says, "I come, and I call you to come to me." The Gospel is freely presented to every man who will hear. And so we preach the Gospel freely to all men, and we trust as we do that God will save some to the uttermost.

But for those of you that are here. You're not a Christian, and you know you're not a Christian. Please understand that Christ calls you. He presents Himself to you. He's calling you by name, today, calling you, saying, "Come to me. Come to me and trust me

for your salvation. Turn from your sin and put your heart in my hands that I might deliver you for all of eternity." Christ is calling you to salvation today. Believe in Christ and be saved. That's the message of the Gospel. That's what Paul is saying when he says, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men." The Gospel in the Lord Jesus Christ is presented to everyone.

Now, let me show you how this connects to the instruction and godliness. God has always been gracious, but Christ made it visible. He came to deliver us from sin and its enslaving power. Some of you need to know and grasp more deeply that the Gospel is not simply about delivering you from the eternal punishment of hell. It is so much more than that. Christ did more than come to save you from hell. He came to save you from sin, and that means He came to save you from sin now, to deliver you from sin now, to transform your life now, so that you would be less marked by sin and more marked by righteousness. That is the purpose of the coming of Christ. And so, His grace presents a manifold motivation to godliness. And what we're going to see now in the rest of the passage is that His grace is shown in the present, the future, and the past purposes of God. There is a chronological dimension to this passage that I want to show to you, and I want you to understand, as we get ready to go into this passage, that we pursue righteousness not to earn God's favor. We don't pursue righteousness now to keep God's favor. God has already given us His favor, if we are Christians. He has set it upon us in an irrevocable way. Rather, we seek godliness because God has already given us His favor. We are responding to grace. We are responding to the purposes of God in our lives in saving us. We gratefully seek to be godly as we grow in our understanding of His purposes. We're not trying to keep God from getting mad at us, because Christ has already turned His wrath away in His work on the cross. He's our propitiation. He's turned the wrath of God away from us. If we are Christians, we abide under the eternal favor of God. And so, we're not trying to fend off anger anymore. Christ has already done that for us. No, we pursue godliness for a different reason. We pursue godliness because of the purposes of God.

We're going to see it in three different ways here this morning from this passage. We pursue godliness, first of all, because of the present purpose of God. That's point number one if you're taking it. Why do we pursue godliness? First of all, it's the present purpose of God in our lives. As you look at your Christian life, you should understand that the grace that saved you is now instructing you on how to live. You are under grace in the sense that it has delivered you from bondage to sin. It has delivered you from the penalty of sin. You bear no risk of eternal judgment, because the grace of God has appeared to you in Christ Jesus. We're speaking to Christians now. Understand, that as you are under grace, and this passage even uses the language of the schoolmaster, as you are under grace, you are also under the instruction of grace. That grace is instructing you, disciplining you, teaching you how to live in this present life.

Look at verse 12 with me. Grace is instructing you how to live. Verses 11 to 14 are one long sentence. And so, in verse 11 it says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men," follow it in verse 12, "instructing us," there it is. Grace is teaching us. It's teaching you. It's teaching me. What's it teaching us? It's instructing us "to deny

ungodliness and worldly desires, and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly," here it is, "in the present age." Here is the present purpose of God. People get so caught up wondering what God's will is for their lives, and I understand that to some degree, but before you ever start to worry about the details of what the will of God is for your employment or for marriage or for any of those earthbound decisions, understand that there's something more fundamental that grace is instructing you to do. The will of God for your life is secondary. It's secondary to think about it in terms of what you're going to do. The will of God for your life is the person that He calls you to be. It's about your character. That's as plain as it could be on the very surface of the text. Look at verse 12 with me again. I want you to see this, and this is the present purpose of God in your life. He says, "In the present age," he's talking about the here and now. What do we do as Christians in the here and now? Grace instructs you. It calls you. It commands you to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age.

We've been the victims of a watered-down Gospel for many many decades in America, a Gospel that promises salvation to supposedly so-called carnal Christians who made a one time profession of Christ but never actually saw it change them. That's not a carnal Christian. That's an unsaved unregenerate man who has never been changed by the reality of salvation. You see grace never leaves a man unchanged. The grace of God in salvation changes a man, changes him at the most profound level. 2 Corinthians says, at 5:17, says, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, new things have come." Well, listen, if your life is still marked by all of the old things that you've ever done and known and loved, if your life is still marked by everything that preceded your supposed conversion to Christ, nothing has changed, you're not under grace. You're under judgment because it is it is intrinsically the nature of grace that it changes us, and it instructs us to deny that prior ungodliness and to pursue sensible righteousness and godliness in the present age. That is the real grace of God. Everything else is a cheap counterfeit that doesn't save.

And so, what does this grace do? Look at verse 12. What is the present purpose of God in real salvation? It instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires. There's the negative part of it. We turn from the ungodliness that we once knew, the remnants of it that still flare up in our flesh. We deny that and say, "That's not what I'm living for. That's not what I want. I reject that. I consciously separate myself from it." And in a positive sense, that grace points us, look at verse 12, to "live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age."

Now, let me approach this from a different perspective, from hopefully, an encouraging pastoral perspective here. I understand that you're just like me in the sense that you struggle with bad desires, bad thoughts. Sometimes, your conduct isn't all that it should be. We're all like that, and it doesn't do us any good to pretend any differently. The question in the midst of that is this, or maybe the better way, the statement that should be made in that is this: in the midst of that you can have a real genuine Scripture-based assurance of salvation. If you see an abiding desire in your life to turn away from sin: you don't want to be ungodly, even though it flares up in your life from time-to-time. You

don't want that. You're not pursuing it. You would like to be free from it. Well, understand that that is the grace of God operative in your life instructing you to deny ungodliness and worldly desires. You say, "Ah!" You're like Paul, "I hate the fact that I'm like this. I don't want that. I reject it." And alongside that you find a desire in your heart that says, "I want to live in godliness." If you can look at your life and say, "You know, the deepest desire of my heart would be that I would be godly, that I would live righteously, that I would be like Christ." Beloved, take heart. That is the mark of a true Christian. We realize Scripture teaches us that we have remnants of sin in us that hold us down like gravity, that pull us down. They keep us from fulfilling all of those noble aspirations of our heart. The fact of the struggle is a mark of grace, not the sign of an absence of grace. It's the reality of a heart that is learning, that has been changed and is continuing to change away from that love of the world, that love of ungodliness, and says, "I want the godliness that is represented in my Lord Jesus Christ." That's the mark of a real Christian.

The fact that you struggle against sin and hate it when you fail is not a sign that you're unsaved, beloved. That abiding effort to resist sin and grow in righteousness is a sign that you are saved and that grace is instructing you, even in your weakness. That is very humbling to realize that, "Oh God, your grace is teaching me. You're patient with me in my struggle." And you step back, and you perceive the reality that there is a principle of sanctifying grace at work in your life shown in your desires to resist sin and pursue righteousness, so that, even in the midst of a struggle, you see there's something real going on here. There is something abiding that has happened in my heart. That is the mark of instructing grace, sanctifying grace, here in this present age. Grace is teaching you to turn away from your former life and to pursue the life that Christ has given you. That is a mark of assurance. That is a mark of grace and gratitude. And for what we're saying here this morning, beloved, is this: if you see that principle at work in your life, understand that the present purpose of God is operating. An eternal God has saved you, and your inner pursuit of righteousness is a mark that an eternal purpose of God is working itself out in the present age in your life in the quiet recesses of your heart. Wow! The One who spoke the worlds into existence, the One who will bring the present age to an end, has a present purpose in your life by name that He's working out.

And so, therefore, the connection is that as you recognize that going on in your heart, then pursue the life that was described in the first 10 verses of Titus chapter 2. You older men, you're to be dignified in life. You're to be mature in faith, because this great purpose of God is at work in your life and that is what He calls you to. In other words, Paul is saying, "There is this present purpose. Get with the program! Swim with the current, not against it." And as you do, your efforts, your motivations, and your affections are buoyed, are encouraged, are strengthened by the fact that you realize that you are living out something that is consistent with a divine powerful purpose that transcends the time and space of your earthly life. That is how the purpose of God in the present age strengthens you in your pursuit of godliness. This is what God wants. And so He is, as it were, on your side in it. Work with His purposes, not against them. That is the purpose of God.

The present purpose of God in your salvation in verse 12 is for you to deny ungodliness and pursue righteousness. It's really pretty simple. It's not complicated in that sense, and yet, salvation, biblical salvation, is about so much more than this present life. This is where the greater context has to take root in your mind. Salvation is about so much more than this present life. It is a horrible disservice to the people of God, the people that Christ redeemed, to so focus on teaching them how, if you're only teaching Christians how to live in this life, you're really doing them a great disservice. Our eyes, as Christians, need to be lifted above this present life. Oh, there's an aspect of it, but we need to be lifted above the 70 years of this earthly life if we're going to think rightly about being a Christian and live rightly in this time, because biblical salvation utterly transcends the 70 years, give or take, of your earthly existence. There is a sense in which, viewed from the perspective of eternity, our 70 years of earthly life are incidental, because there is so much greater purposes of God at work than simply what's happening in our day-to-day life.

Point number 2. You have to look at the future purpose of God. The future purpose of God. Salvation has a future reality which shapes genuine Christians in the way that we think and live. A true Christian is mindful of the fact that, "I want to pursue godliness in the present life." There's more to it than that, though. We, as believers in Christ, have a confident expectation, a certain expectation, that Christ is going to come again in the future. Look at verse 13. And understanding that there's no break in the sentence, there is no change in the paragraph, Paul is saying, "Pursue godliness, because the grace of God has appeared, and it's also appeared in this way in the future purpose of God." Look at verse 13. Paul says, "As your pursuing righteousness in the present age," verse 13, "as you're doing that," verse 13, "looking for," looking ahead, anticipating, expecting, mindful of, "the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus." The Bible teaches us that Jesus Christ is going to bring the present age to an end. Life is not going to continue on in an unbroken cycle of what we see today. Christ is going to supernaturally intervene in the future and subdue all men and all nations to His perfect control. He will intervene in life. He will visibly come in the future, just like He visibly came in the past. And when He comes, He's going to turn everything upside down. He's going to display His glory. He's going to destroy the wicked and establish His glory here on earth.

Paul doesn't go into a lot of eschatological details of that here in verse 13, and so we won't either. Simply to point out that God has a plan that includes Christ coming back to earth. Look at Acts chapter 1. This is an emphasis in Scripture again and again. Acts chapter 1. When Christ left the first time, His disciples were looking on as Christ ascended into heaven. Look at Acts chapter 1 verse 10. A cloud had received Christ out of their sight, and, in verse 10, "as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them, and 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 tense. "'He will come in just the same way as you watched Him go into heaven.'" He said, "There will be a visible return of Christ that you will see with your physical eyes." That is the purpose of God in the future. We accept, we recognize, we understand that this present age will be pockmarked by sorrow and sin and

disappointed expectations. We are okay with that. You understand that, right? We accept that. We embrace that because we understand that our lives in the purpose of God transcend this present age. There is a future purpose of God in which Christ will return, and, when He returns, He will remember us in the process and His victory over this world will be shared with us. We share in that blessed hope.

So, we live now with an eye toward the future. We possess eternal salvation now. There is nothing to be added to it by anything that we do, but we understand that we have not yet received the fullness of everything that God intends for us. This is simply an introduction in the present age. Your life now is simply an introduction to grace. The full course, the full banquet, is yet ahead. This is not about your best life now at all. Our best life as Christians is still future. When this age is banished and Christ is reigning supreme, we are going to be so overwhelmed with the joy and glory of that. As our children sang, just a few moments ago, "We're going to see Him face-to-face in all of His glory." There will be no question at that time about whether salvation is great. There will be no question at that time about our past sorrows and sins. It's all going to be consumed in the grandeur of the glory of the return of Christ and seeing Him face-to-face and belonging to Him and knowing that He has welcomed us, He has saved us, He has redeemed us and He shares all of that glory and victory with us by name. That is what we're living for, not the present. And that is supposed to impact your godly living today. When you understand the ultimate outcome of God's eternal purposes in salvation. That this present age yields to a future return of Christ in glory. When you understand that, it floods your heart with hope, and expectation, and motivation, and affection to pursue godliness now, because you're simply getting in line with what is certain to occur. The future purpose of God is the appearing of the glory of Jesus Christ. You are supposed to be looking forward to that, as a Christian. You are supposed to be longing for that, to want that more than anything.

I remember a time, many years ago, I was a fairly new Christian. I was kind of enjoying what life was giving me at that point, and I remember saying to Bud and Gloria Condon. His name finally came back to me, just now, after I was trying remember it for weeks, and so I'm grateful for that. I was with Bud and Gloria Condon in northern Illinois. This was before I was even married, and I remember saying at that time, and as we were talking about life and what was going on. I remember saying, to my great shame here this morning, saying, and I don't member the exact words that I said, but it was something like this, "I hope Christ doesn't come back right away, because I love what's going on right now." Do you understand that I committed a great sin against Christ when I said that and wanted that? That was despicable. Are you kidding me? To prefer the present life, the present age, to the coming of Christ? What was wrong with me? What is wrong with us that we're so preoccupied with this age that we would hold Christ off with a stiff forearm and say, "No, not yet. Let's enjoy this a little bit more." Are you kidding me? No, no, the whole purpose of God is that Christ will come back and be in glory, and that will be the crowning achievement of our salvation. And when we see Him and when we're with Him, that will be the fulfillment of the purpose of God. And for the sake of whatever was going on in life at that point, I would say, "I would rather have this age than that age?" No, no, that was wicked of me to say such a thing. It was a direct contradiction of

this passage which says, "As you're pursuing righteousness in the present age, you're to be looking for, anticipating, wanting, desiring, hoping for, the return of Christ and the display of His glory."

Beloved, don't be like I was. Don't love this life that much. It should be settled in your heart that the greatest thing that could ever happen for you would be that Christ would choose today to come back. If Christ came back before I finish this sermon, I would gladly leave my notes behind. If He calls us to be with Him in the air before I finish and get to my third point, that's great! What do you mean, "Amen?" I'm just messing with you, brother. No, I get it. That's right! That's right! We want that more than anything, and so we live with this sense of expectation that it's going to happen, and we want it so much that Christ can intervene, and we are delighted to leave behind everything that we've thought, everything that we've planned, everything that we've loved, for that to see the fulfillment of the greater future purpose of God. For that to break in on time and be the new reality, that would be the best thing that could ever happen. That's what we're supposed to want.

And, I want you to see, I'm just going to give you a short sampling. We saw Acts 1. I want you to just see a little bit of Scripture talking about, where Christ talks about, His future coming. Turn to Matthew 24. We're just going to kind of parachute into these passages and then jump right out of them. It's not a great way to do it, but I just want you to have a taste of it. The future coming of Christ. He is going to come again. The future coming of Christ is more certain than what you will have for lunch today. It is more certain than us finishing this service this morning. This is guaranteed by the Word of God. We don't know what our next breath might bring, but we know from the Word of God that Christ will come again. This is the great certainty in which we anchor everything about our approach to living life now is that Christ is going to come again. Matthew 24 verse 37. "The coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away." Here it is. "So will the coming of the Son of Man be." The coming of the Son of Man, Christ is going to come again. Jesus said, "I'm coming again. I've come once. I'm coming twice."

Look over at John 14 for perhaps a little bit more familiar passage reminder of this. John chapter 14. He came once. He went away. He's going to come back. The simplicity of that is so sweet. John 14 verse 3. Let's start in verse 2. Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would've told you, for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you," verse 3, "I will come again and receive you to Myself that where I am there you may be also." Christ said, "I will come again." Brothers and sisters believe it. He wasn't bluffing. He wasn't joking. He wasn't making empty promises that He had no intention to fulfill. He is the eternal Son of God who knows the beginning from the end. He has shown us in Scripture His future purpose that He is going to come back. And that has to shape what we love in this world, what we do in this world, and what we pursue in this world. We live now in the pursuit of

righteousness, knowing that our righteous Savior is going to return and establish righteousness on the earth. Let's just get with the program right now instead of waiting.

The Bible says that this world is passing away. The climactic punch to that will be the return of Christ. That is what we live for. That is what we hope for. Brothers, we sing through trials today because Christ is coming back. He will prevail. He will share His victory with us. That's why we can sing now. That's why we pursue righteousness now. It's because of the future purpose of God in the return of Christ. That's what Paul is saying here in Titus 2. So look at the passage with me again. Turn back to Titus 2, if you're not there already. The grace of God has appeared. Present purpose? Instructing us to deny ungodliness and live sensibly, righteousness, and godly in the present age. Future purpose? Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior. We live, we pursue, righteousness in the present age with an eye on the future.

Point number 3: the past purpose of God. The past purpose of God. Not that it's over and completed and never to be revisited, but rather, the past purpose of God in the crucifixion. And it's very fascinating to see the way in which Paul moves as you look at this passage from the big picture perspective, as we're trying to do this morning. Paul seamlessly moves from the present to the future to the past, all in one sentence. In the great, eternal, unfolding of the plan of God, Paul talks about the present age, the future hope, and here, in verse 14, he looks back to the cross. Look at verse 14 with me. He says, "Who gave Himself," our great God and Savior Christ Jesus, "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." Oh, please hear me on this: Christ gave Himself in a most magnificent way. He gave Himself in a climactic way at the cross when He offered up His life, offered up His body, offered up His blood as a living sacrifice for us to redeem us from sin. But that singularly great act at the crucifixion was a crucial aspect of an even greater giving of Himself. If you think about it, Christ gave Himself for us so fully that He left the glories of heaven to come down to earth to dwell as a man for 33 years in order to give His life and blood for us. This is a great, incomprehensible act of self-sacrifice, of a self-giving, for the sake of your salvation. He left heaven for us. He gave Himself so completely, and the climax of that was on the cross when He redeemed us from every lawless deed and with the intention of purifying for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works.

Beloved, when you're thinking about when the Word of God calls us to deny ungodliness and pursue righteousness, understand that that is a seamless, unified, perfect consistency with the past purpose of God in the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. He's calling us to live consistently with the purpose of the first coming of Christ, because when Christ gave himself for us, He was accomplishing a twin purpose that corresponds perfectly with our present pursuit of godliness. Notice that. Look at verse 14 with me. Notice that, in the negative sense, He gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed. One aspect of the purpose of Christ on the cross was to redeem us, to buy us out of the slavery to sin that we found ourselves in. That's why Christ came, was to redeem us from that ungodly life, to redeem us from the bondage of sin.

Well, look up at verse 12 and see the correspondence. In the present age, God's grace instructs us to deny ungodliness. That's the purpose of the cross. He came to redeem us from every lawless deed, and so as you're living out godliness today, when you resist temptation today, when you put your hand over your mouth to keep yourself from speaking gossip and biting, sarcastic, unkind words, when you're resisting ungodliness in that way, you are acting in accordance with the purpose of Christ on the cross. Deny ungodliness now, because that's why Christ died back then. Look at verse 14. "He gave Himself to purify for Himself," we belong to Christ, not to ourselves. "He gave Himself to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Well, notice how that corresponds to verse 12. Grace instructs us to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age. Present age, pursue godliness. Past purpose of God, Christ died to purify us for exactly that purpose.

Christ didn't simply erase sin in our lives. He positively took us as His people. He bought us. By right of ownership, He directs the way that we think and live. You own a car. You get to determine who drives it and where it goes. Christ bought you. He gets to direct you and tell you what to be. And so, beloved, you and I have to see our present lives in the greater context of God's great purposes. Do you see? Do you get a glimpse of the fact that there is a transcendence to salvation that dwarfs the present life? This is all something that originated in the mind and plan of God in eternity past. 2,000 years ago Christ came and with the deliberate intention of His heart, of His mind, of His will, "I'm going to buy a people. I'm going to buy a people. I'm going to redeem them from every lawless deed that they ever committed, and my intention is to own them as my own, and I'm going to purify them so that they belong to me and serve my purposes." In the present age, God saved you. In time and space now, we live this out. We're living out a life that is designed to be consistent with the saving purposes of Christ on the cross, knowing that the ultimate outcome of that is going to be the climax of return of Christ in glory when righteousness is established and He reigns supreme in glory with His people forever and ever.

There's just this vast sweep of God's purpose! And when the Bible calls us to live righteously and godly in the present age, understand that the power of the multi-faceted purpose of God is at work in that, past, present, and future. See your life in that context is what this passage says. And when it gets down to the details, the mundane details, the frustrating details of life, let your affections and motivations be shaped by, encouraged profoundly by, the fact that it's about more than today. This is about what God has done, what He is doing, and what He has yet to do. We get to be a part of that. In our daily lives there is eternal significance in everything that we do because it's an outworking of the purpose of God. Beloved, what I want you to see, what I insist that you walk out of here thinking is this: that in light of the past, present, and future purposes of God, it is the most noble thing in the world to be a Christian.

Let's bow in prayer.

Father, You've called us to understand Your purposes and to fulfill them in the ordinary things of life. Help us, as we pursue godliness today, to be overwhelmed to the point of

humble gratitude and worship that You have included us in Your great eternal purposes. Father, we are just dwarfed in the magnitude of the greatness of our salvation, and, Father, we thank You for the past coming of Christ. We thank You for the present work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and we thank You, Father, that the best is by far still yet to come. We believe in the future coming of Christ. We trust in that blessed hope of the coming of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. And we pray, Father, that that might shape and transform the way that we live in humble godliness today. Teach us to love one another. Father, may Your Word be ever more precious to us, and may we be those who show forth our love for You by our obedience to Your Word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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