

What an Apostle Is For

Titus 1:1-4

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*The Lord's Day Morning
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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Titus 1. We're continuing to work our way through the Pastoral Epistles, those three letters from an apostle, pastor, elder, veteran missionary evangelist, Paul, to two young ministers of the gospel who were responsible for ministering not only in the settled charges of two congregations, but were responsible for evangelism and missions.

We've looked already at the book of I Timothy, we'll look now at the book of Titus for a few weeks. It's a short letter, it's a short letter, about a page, page and a half. Many of the themes that you'll find in the letter from Paul to Titus are themes that you will be familiar with if you have studied First Timothy with us.

Now Paul is writing, again, in this book to a trusted associate—not this time to Timothy, but to Titus, a man whom he loves and values, who has different characteristics than Timothy, but is equally useful in the church. He's been commissioned to establish the Christian church on Crete.

Now, the Cretans were not renowned for their morality amongst their contemporaries. If you allow your eyes to scan down to verse 12 of chapter one, you'll see a rather unflattering quotation about the Cretans that apparently one of their own authors had stated about them.

And so Paul is speaking to Titus, who is ministering to a church in the context of a society that was suffused with immorality. Sound familiar? Paul's words to Titus are timely for us because of the corresponding circumstances that we as Christians face in a culture rampant with immorality, and an immorality that is permeating and penetrating the Christian churches as well. In fact, it becomes apparent in this letter that one of Paul's concerns is that the immorality of the culture has in fact impacted this local congregation, or congregations, of Christians deeply.

He recognizes that Christ calls us to be in the world, but not of it; and yet, in this congregation you can say that there are some at least who are of the world, but not in it. The world is in the church, and he is concerned that the church would be

distinct, especially in her life and witness in this immoral context.

And so, in this letter Paul will write to Titus to instruct him how to deal with these kinds of matters. But interestingly, just like in First Timothy, Paul will deal with matters of church organization, leadership, and administration; and you may well ask yourself the question: if the crying need of the hour was for Christians in this congregation to live more godly lives in the context of a pagan and immoral culture, why in the world would Paul spend time talking about elders; about different groups within the church; about dealing with false teaching that was troubling the church; about matters of church administration. Why would he touch on these subjects? Was Paul somewhat wandering from his focus by doing this? And of course, the answer is, “No,” because Paul knows that if godliness is going to be established in this local congregation (or congregations), it is going to require elders—godly elders, qualified elders according to Scripture, biblical elders shepherding the people of God. He knows that it is going to take sound teaching, because false teaching is not going to produce godliness. He knows that if godliness is going to prosper in this congregation the different groups and the divisions that exist are going to have to be brought together and healed, because the gospel always evidences itself not only in individual moral transformation, but in social transformation, and the way that Christians relate to one another, and the way they love one another and support one another.

And so in all of the topics that Paul addresses in this very short letter, far from wandering from Dan to Beersheba with his thoughts, he has a focused idea all the time. He wants to help Titus pastor Christian congregations in the context of an immoral culture, and to encourage those Christians and congregations to adorn the gospel of God our Savior in all of life by the way that we live. That, in fact, is the great focus of this book: adorning the gospel of God our Savior in all things. The gospel has the moral power to transform lives and social relationships, and that gospel power serves as a witness to the world around us that the gospel is not the fabrication of our “wish fulfillment,” but it is in fact a reality worked in us by the Holy Spirit. And so Paul, throughout this letter, has in view an exhortation to Titus to help this people adorn the gospel of God our Savior in all things.

Now, in this passage, and let me just outline it for you today. This is just Paul's word of greeting, his salutation, but in it you are going to see three things: First of all, you are going to see the title of the messenger. You'll see that in verse one. Then, in verses one through three, secondly, you're going to see the service, or the ministry goal of the messenger; and then, thirdly, you are going to see the blessing of the messenger, in verse four. So in verse one, the title of the messenger; in verses 1-3 the service or the ministry goal of the messenger; and then in verse four, the blessing of the messenger.

Before we read God's word and hear it proclaimed, let's look to Him in prayer and ask for His blessing. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for Your word. Already having looked at this book and considered its context, we readily see how appropriate this word of exhortation given to a small group of Christian congregations on the Island of Crete two thousand years ago is just as fresh, is just as significant, is just as relevant, is just as important, is just as urgent today as it was when Paul first wrote it, with his eyes turned to the West, perhaps, prepared to go even as far as Spain in the word of missions. He still looked back on this congregation, on these Christians, and he yearned that the power of the gospel would show forth in their lives, and that they would adorn the gospel with their lives in all things, in spite of their immoral environment. We feel this need, too; so speak to us by Your word. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hear God's word:

Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, but at the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior; to Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, inerrant and authoritative word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

Paul wants to exhort these Christians, tempted as they are to live with one foot in the world and another foot in the church, tempted as they are to be conformed to the thinking and the living standards and the behavior of this age and this world, rather than to be transformed by the renewing of their minds according to the word of God—Paul speaks to this congregation to exhort them to adorn the gospel in all things: in the way that they believe; in the way that they trust; in the way that they live. And he begins that exhortation even in his word of greeting. Before he has even finished identifying himself, he is already providing an example to these Christians of what being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ does in regard to promoting our living to adorn the gospel of God our Savior in all things. Let's look at two or three things that we learn in this passage

I. The nature of the apostolic messengers.

First of all, let's look at the title of the messenger. Paul speaks of himself here not only as a servant of the Lord—and that's language that was so often used of the prophets in the Old Testament—but he speaks of himself as an apostle, one who was officially invested with special powers by Jesus Christ and sent as an emissary by Jesus Christ. He speaks of himself, then, as a special, divine

messenger. And look at the nature of this apostolic messenger as we see from his title: he is “Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ.”

Now, there are many things that we could say about that passage, but just a couple of things immediately come to mind.

You know from your study of the Old Testament that there were two types of slaves in Israel. There were temporary slaves. Slavery by definition was limited in Israel. After a set period of time, servants were to be set free. It might be at the end of their payment of a debt; it might be at the end of a seven-year Sabbath cycle; or it might be in the Jubilee Year, but servants were not to be permanently held in the status of that servitude and captivity.

And yet, in the Old Testament there was a provision for a slave who permanently committed himself to his master. He was called a *bond-servant*. By his own initiation and volition, this servant could say to his master, “I want to serve you always.” And Paul begins this letter by saying “I am a bond-servant of God.” In other words, he is saying he is willingly self-committed to permanent service of the Lord.

And he also says that he is an *apostle* of Jesus Christ. He did not call himself to the ministry. He was sent by Christ into the ministry. Of course, in Paul's own biography there is the striking story recorded for us in Acts 9, and told again on at least two occasions, where Paul, though he was on his way to Damascus to persecute and kill Christians, imprisoning them and harassing them, yet he was met by the Lord Jesus Christ on the way. He was changed, he was converted, he was humbled, and he was called into the service of the Lord. And so the Apostle Paul on more than one occasion will remind Christians that he was not called to the ministry by an apostle; he did not learn the gospel from another apostle; he learned the gospel and was called into ministry by the risen and ascended Jesus Christ Himself in person. And so when Paul says he is an apostle of Jesus Christ, that he has been vested with the authority of Christ, that he is a plenipotentiary messenger of Jesus Christ, given special powers and able to speak on Christ's behalf to His people, that is exactly what he means. It comes right out of his own experience of God's grace to him, and because he had been called into this service—this glad service, a service that he continually tells us that he didn't deserve—he also tells us that he was willingly committed to that service. Conscious as he was of being called by grace into the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, he was willingly committed as a permanent servant of the Lord. It's a beautiful picture of God by grace drawing Paul to Himself, and then Paul willingly saying, ‘Lord, I want to be Your servant forever.’

Now, notice how even in that title, even in this description of his position, Paul is supplying Titus and the Cretans and you and me with truth which serves as not only an example as to how to live the Christian life in an immoral culture, but serves as an exhortation to us to commitment and to mission.

Paul very clearly, as he sees himself as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, has a sense of mission. He knows what he's here for. He knows what his purpose is in life, and he not only knows his mission and his purpose, he is gladly, willingly, wholeheartedly, and permanently committed to it.

Now think about it. There are Cretans in these local Christian congregations being pastured and nurtured by Titus who are being influenced by the world around them. What's going on? Well, one thing that's going on is that they are forgetting who they are and what they're here for. They have forgotten their mission and purpose in life: to adorn the gospel of God in all things. And so Paul's very example of his sense of mission and his commitment to that mission serve as an encouragement to, an example to follow, for the Christians that Titus was ministering to, and to us as well.

When we are living lives that contradict our profession, one of the things that is always going on is that we are forgetting who we are. We are forgetting what God called us to, what He made us for, what our purpose is in life. Our purpose is *to glorify and enjoy God forever*. And that purpose elicits, evokes, a permanent willing commitment to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isn't it striking--the very passage that we thought of today in the institution of baptism--Jesus says to His disciples, "Go, make disciples." He doesn't say, "Go, get people to sign a card, or to pray a prayer, or to make a verbal pledge." He says, "Go, make disciples." It's interesting that He wants followers who are ready to follow Him wherever He goes, even unto death. That's what He's trying to make in the Christian church. And Paul is "Exhibit A." Paul doesn't just, in Acts 8, sign a card or pray a prayer. He commits his whole life to the Lord Jesus Christ, to serve Him. And he serves with that sense of purpose and a commitment to that sense of purpose that is born of his realization of God's grace to him. And if we realize God's grace to us, and we realize the mission and the purpose that the Lord has given to us, it will help us as we seek to combat sin; as we seek to keep from being conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

II. The nature of the service of the apostolic messenger.

Secondly, look at the nature of Paul's service--the service of the messenger. Again in verses 1-3, here we see Paul state very compactly his goal in ministry. He's telling Titus what he's trying to do in ministry: 'When I go out as a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, this is what I'm shooting for. This is what my preaching and teaching is aimed at.'

And he tells you at least three things:

...for the faith of those chosen of God; for the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness; in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, but at the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior.

So notice, Paul says here's what my ministry is aimed for. It's aimed at saving faith; at sanctifying truth; and at encouraging hope. It's aimed to promote saving faith among the chosen of God. Paul's desire is that those who have been chosen by God will believe and trust savingly in Jesus Christ for salvation as He is offered in the gospel. His apostolic teaching is with a view to those whom God has chosen believing on Him. It aims to see faith expressed and exhibited.

Now notice, Paul makes it clear that his preaching is not the source of his hearers' faith. What is the source of his hearers' faith? God. How does he make that clear? He calls those chosen of God. God's choice of them is at the root of their response to God in faith, but Paul's purpose in ministry is to teach and to preach and disciple so that the chosen of God will exercise faith. He longs for them to respond to the free and gracious overtures of the gospel by believing, by trusting, by having faith in God, in Jesus Christ, in the gospel. That's the first goal of his ministry and service.

Secondly, he goes on to say that he is an apostle for the knowledge of the truth that is according to godliness. In other words, Paul is saying, "My ministry is aimed at producing a sanctifying knowledge in the people of God." I don't simply want them to have more information than other people. I don't simply want them to be smarter than other people. I'm not interested in them knowing certain facts that other people don't know. The point is I want to teach them a truth that transforms their lives. It is a truth that is unto godliness. This is not the last time in this book that Paul will explain the connection between sound theology and godly living. You cannot live the Christian life if you do not believe the truth of God's word as He sets it forth in that word. And so Paul says, "My goal in ministry is the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness: a true knowledge that is productive of real godliness and piety."

Thirdly, Paul says 'My goal in ministry is with a view to the faith of God's people and the sanctifying knowledge of the truth in light of the hope of eternal life.' You see this in verse 2. The motivation for Paul's labor, the motivation for their living of the Christian life, is this hope of eternal life. It is a hope that has been promised by God, who cannot lie. It is a hope that has been promised long ago that is now being manifest to the full in the proclamation of Paul and the apostles.

And I want you to notice how each of these three things which Paul says are at the heart of the ministry serve to cultivate the Christians in Crete living all of life to the glory of God, adorning the gospel of God our Savior in all things.

First of all, you can't adorn the gospel if you don't believe the gospel. If you haven't embraced Jesus Christ by faith, you cannot adorn the gospel of God, and so it is obvious that Paul's ministry has to be aimed at seeing faith expressed in the gospel.

Secondly, notice that Paul, in cultivating a ministry that was designed to set forth the truth that is unto godliness, makes it clear that Christian truth is itself transformative. It changes our lives. It has a moral power. It not only changes us as individuals, but it changes us in relationships to one another: husbands to wives, and wives to husbands; parents to children, and children to parents; employers to employees, and employees to employers; neighbors to neighbors; citizens to fellow citizens. It has a transforming effect of us morally individually, but also in our social relationships, and Paul wants us to understand that if we do not embrace that sanctifying truth, that we cannot live the life of godliness intended by the Lord, and we will not live this life of godliness intended by the Lord, we will not adorn the gospel of God our Savior in all things unless there is in us the hope of eternal life.

And Paul knows that that hope both is, and is to come. There is already in the believer the seed of the experience of eternal life, but that everlasting fellowship has not come yet to its full fruition. That full fruition is yet to come, and unless the hope is strong for that fruition, we will not live a life of godliness; rather, we will set our hope on other things.

Now, let's step back and ask two questions: one is, if the ministry of the gospel is aimed at evoking a saving faith, a sanctifying truth, and encouraging hope in the people of God, how's the ministry doing in your heart? Are you responding to the feast of ministry that you get in the classrooms of First Presbyterian Church, or in the Day School, or in this wonderful city where we are blessed to hear so much godly, Bible-believing preaching—are you responding to that truth with saving faith? Is the truth having a sanctifying effect on your life? Are you taking encouragement from the hope that is set before you?

And, are you praying for ministry to have that effect on you? And are you praying for ministers to keep their eye on the ball? Don't look at something else! Aim for these things! You are aimed, ministers of the gospel, to preach a truth which aims for the response of saving faith, which sees sanctifying truth building up disciples into Christian maturity, and gives them a hope which transcends the troubles, and the struggles, and the trials and tribulations of this life. Are you praying for ministers to be faithful in the focus of that ministry? And are you seeing its effect on your own heart?

III. The apostolic benediction on Titus and our labors.

One last thing: look at verse 4. Paul concludes this “hello,” this salutation, with a

word of blessing, and he uses very tender words about Titus, this church-planter and young minister. “To Titus, my true child in a common faith...” and then he pronounces the blessing: “Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.”

Now think how comforting that would have been to Titus. Paul is going to tell us in just eight verses that Titus is ministering amongst a people who have a reputation for being lazy, gluttonous, and liars. And Paul's saying, ‘Titus, go plant churches amongst those people.’ And so it would have been very easy for Titus to look to these circumstances, look at his congregation, and look at his culture, and be discouraged. But Paul says, ‘Titus, your encouragement in ministry in that local setting is not going to be drawn from the congregation, its circumstances, or the culture. It's going to be drawn from God. So just as the Christian life begins, Titus, with God's grace and peace, I pronounce God's grace and peace on you so that you will remember that if this ministry is going to prosper, it's going to be because of God's grace and peace.’

God's grace to us, His unmerited favor, is at the very outset of Christian life. We do not create the Christian life in us; we do not speak it into reality; we do not create it by believing, or being sincere; the Christian life starts with God's unmerited favor reaching out to us first. We simply respond. But until God's grace is there, the Christian life has not yet begun.

And the Christian life begins with God's peace, because when God's unmerited favor comes to us in Jesus Christ, the just condemnation which He has against us is dealt with, and our enmity toward Him is dealt with, so that for the first time in our lives we begin to experience true fellowship and communion with God. And so the Christian life begins with grace and peace, but the Christian life ends with grace and peace, as well. And it is the grace and peace of God that supplies the encouragement to the Christian in every circumstance, in every congregation, in every culture.

You see, the Christian longs to eternally and everlastingly experience God's unmerited and undeserved favor, and the peace that flows from that. Not just a peace which means the cessation of God's judicial judgment against us, but a peace which means all of the blessings of being in the family of God, of being a child of God. And Paul pronounces this blessing on Titus. ‘Titus, God's grace, God's peace on you.’

And this is just Paul's “Hello”! This is just, “I'm Paul; I'm writing this to you, Titus; this is my salutation.” If that's his “hello”—and by the way, this is one of my favorite salutations in all of the New Testament—if that's his “hello”, just wait till you see what's coming next!

Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for Your word—the word of example from Paul, the word of exhortation about his ministry, and especially this word of blessing. Grant that we would believe; that we would know the sanctifying truth of the word; that we would have instilled in our hearts and stoked by the Spirit that hope of eternal life; and that we would live dependent, reliant upon Your heavenly benediction. These things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Grace and peace from God the Father, and our Savior, Christ Jesus. Amen.

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