

## **Trinity in Action: Kindness Appears**

**Titus 3:3-7**

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

You may have heard me say this before: we do not merely believe in God. We are not deists. And, while we ARE monotheists, we are not monotheists in the way Jews and Muslims are monotheists. We are Trinitarians. We believe in one God who exists AS three persons. Or, to put it differently, we believe in three persons who, in their mutual relations, just ARE the one God.

As with last week, we are not going to try and probe the inner life and being of God – the Trinity in its own existence – this morning. Though all of eternity will be spent gazing into that light. We are going to repair to the works of God, where it is easier, and where it is given to us to see the hand, the face, the splendor of the Triune God more readily. In particular, we are going to look (second week in a row) at the Trinity at work in our salvation. We'll do this from our NT lesson, from Titus chapter 3. It's one of those dense texts of Paul. It has been called "the fullest statement of salvation in the NT." I am going to make 5 points. When, what why, how, and the end (or goal). So, let's begin with when.

### **I. When**

Verse 3: speaks of a time when we were without God and without hope in the world. At one time, the text says: we were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. It's a grim picture of the human race under sin, guilt and condemnation. But this time is not the "when" we are going to talk about. It's the bleak backdrop to the "when" which shines forth here. We were enslaved, then verse 4 says: But WHEN the kindness and love of God (goodness and lovingkindness) our Savior appeared. This is what Paul calls, earlier in this book: the grace of God appearing bringing salvation for all people. God here, without any qualifier, should be taken to be the Father.

The "when" is the time in which the Father has sent the Son. The time in which God has appeared in Christ. But look at the lovely manner in which this is stated. When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared. Kindness – in humans this is a fruit of the Spirit -- working deep in the soil of one's soul – and we desperately need more of it. In the ancient world it was often considered the

highest virtue of a deity or a human ruler. Here it carries the idea of God's patient goodness. His generosity. His pitying concern. It is the kindness of God which leads us to repentance.

This is truly beautiful. This is how God brings us to repentance and new life. He rarely argues us into the kingdom. He kills us with his kindness. Thus Jesus: Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is KIND to the ungrateful and wicked.

So important is kindness, that Ephesians 2:7 – a truly underappreciated text – says this: God raised us up, and seated us with Christ, in the heavenly places, SO THAT – there's another SO THAT – why did God save us and seat us with Christ in the heavens? In order that, in the coming ages, he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his KINDNESS to us in Christ Jesus. So that, for all eternity, God could show his kindness – his Fatherly goodness -- to us in Christ. Kindness leads to repentance, and kindness will be on display unto all eternity.

But the Father's kindness is coupled here with his love. The kindness and love of God our Savior appeared. The word for love is "*philanthropia*." It's basically what we know as philanthropy. Which means the love of mankind. God is the greater lover of the human race. When this kindness and love appeared. That is the time we are in now, the time of our text.

## II. What

Secondly, then, WHAT did God do at this time? This is easy. V.5 He saved us. This is actually the main subject and verb of this long sentence (vv. 4-7 are one Greek sentence). This is the whole text in a nutshell: He saved us. Once and for all. Past tense. And that does not mean that this is just about initial salvation – this is a definitive action which secures your destiny. Salvation is not a cooperative arrangement. It is a mighty intervention of God's love and kindness to an enslaved and deceived people (curved in on themselves). He saves us in spite of ourselves, in the teeth of our sin and evil. And certainly, as the text continues: Not because of righteous deeds we have done. Salvation is not based on your righteous deeds. And this, in a book, which 6 times will exhort us to be zealous for good works.

Good works are commanded, and they will be evaluated, but it is at the heart of the Reformation, and the heart of Scripture, to grasp that Salvation from beginning to end, is by grace through faith apart from (not on the basis of) works.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> *not by works, so that no one can boast.*

We shall be found in him, Paul says in Philipians, *not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law*, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

Romans 11: *And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.* If you mix grace with works on the matter of salvation, you destroy grace.

2 Timothy 1: He has saved us and called us —*not because of anything we have done* but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. He saved us. Once and for all. He saved us. Period. That's the "what."

### **III. Why**

Third, then, why? Why does he save us? What is the basis for his saving action? It's simple, it's in the middle of v.5: because of (or by) his mercy. His pity for us in our distress. Mercy flows from the most merciful God. The One who, when his glory passed before Moses, declared that he was "the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious." Mercy, then, is a chief feature of God's glory. And Scripture teaches that his mercy is over all his works. It repeatedly asserts that the Lord is merciful in all his ways, and his mercies are new every morning. He is the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort. Thus Jesus can command: Be merciful, as your Heavenly Father is merciful. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Tis mercy all, immense and free.

### **IV. How**

That brings us to the fourth point, the "how?" How did God save us? What does this mercy look like in action? And here we see the flowering, the unfolding, of the work of the whole Trinity in our salvation. For the Father saves us, though the Spirit and the Son. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Spirit to quicken us, to move us from enslavement to salvation, to raise us from death to life.

This action washes or cleanses us, and there is probably an allusion to baptism here, as the outward sign of the Spirit's interior cleansing. This washing of rebirth and renewal is otherwise known as being born again, or our regeneration, our recreation in Christ. The Spirit does not desire to adjust us or repair us – he seeks to remake us. He places us in the realm of the new creation. The old has passed away, behold the new has come. By the Holy Spirit, the Christian now lives in, and lives out of, the new creation.

And v.6 says: the Spirit was given to us, poured out on us generously, richly, through Jesus Christ our Savior. The Spirit is given to us by the risen and ascended Christ. The Father who saves us, does so by sending the Spirit through the Son. (Nutshell: Repeat).

Listen to Peter's Pentecost Sermon in Acts 2: Speaking of Christ, he says: Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. You can hear the allusion to Pentecost here in our text, in the language of the Spirit being "poured out." God is not miserly. He pours the Spirit out profusely, generously. And he does that through the crucified and now raised Christ. And in doing so, the Spirit unites to us Jesus Christ – so that we might return to the Father.

So now the picture becomes complete. We see the three persons working in harmony, in utter unity as one, in love and kindness and mercy to affect our renewal. The Father saves us by sending the Spirit through the Son. We come, then, to our fifth and final point. What is the goal, the end of this Trinitarian salvation?

Verse 7: the result of the gift of the Spirit is that, through faith (not mentioned but its implied here), we are justified by grace (again, "by grace" here means apart from works). So here we have an important addition to our rebirth and renewal. Here Paul says that we are justified. This is a legal term. It means we are acquitted. Counted as righteous. Clothed in the righteousness of Christ alone. In justification, the judgment of the last day has already been passed on the you – and you have already-- been found not guilty. There is therefore NOW no condemnation (legal term) for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Now, we live in a time when there is a lot of confusion about salvation – even among Protestants – even among allegedly reformed Protestants. Usually what happens is that some facet of our salvation is emphasized to the exclusion or the minimizing of some other facet.

So notice how full and balanced Paul is. We have renovation (washing and renewal), that is sanctification. And we have legal standing – we are justified by grace. Sin itself has a two-fold profile. Guilt and corruption. Justification deals with our guilt. Sanctification deals with our corruption. Sanctification and Justification. Transformation and legal vindication. These things are distinct, but they are inseparable. And we have them side by side (in Christ Jesus) in this text. All of this marvelous, free salvation, so great a salvation, is so that we might become heirs having (according to) the hope of eternal life.

So notice – I never tire of pointing this out because its everywhere – God did not save us for some merely this-worldly social, cultural or political ends. He saved us for communion with Himself in everlasting glory. Which here is put like this:

that we might be heirs having the hope of eternal life. Let's break this into two parts. Heirs and the Hope of Eternal life.

## **Heirs**

Heirs do not yet have their inheritance. They are destined to inherit. They have a pledge or a foretaste of the inheritance in the Spirit. We have already begun to taste, to participate in, the grand inheritance that is ours – namely life with God in the new creation. But for now, amidst the sufferings of this age, we live by hope. Paul, in Romans 8, puts it this way: Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

As heirs, we do not yet have the inheritance. For flesh and blood, before the bodily resurrection, CANNOT inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50).

## **Hope**

Thus, our second point here, we are heirs having the HOPE of eternal life. Again the accent is wholly future. Yes, we have eternal life begun in us now. But Paul is not talking about that HERE. He is talking about something possessed by hope. The HOPE of eternal life. He is talking about consummated life in the eschaton. The bringing to completion, the granting of our full inheritance, is in view here. Another way to think of it is this: eternal life here means the life of eternity, full possession of the life of God in our glorified humanity.

Notice how this very book of Titus opens: Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect, and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, <sup>2</sup> in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began. Paul labors for the elect in the hope of eternal life. And here, in our passage, he says the Triune God saves us that we might become heirs of the hope of eternal life.

This eschatological glory, this communion with, and worship of, the Trinitarian Savior is why we do ALL that we do: To this end, Paul says, we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God. Fight the good fight of the faith, he tells Timothy. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called. In other words, the Triune God does all these things to bring us FULLY, by sight not by faith, in full possession and not by hope, to bring us to Himself. New Creatures in the New Creation. Renewed creatures in the renewed cosmos.

That the same love and kindness which saved us might be lavished upon us in the ages to come. Ages in which the grand preoccupation of the redeemed will be the Trinitarian mystery in all its splendor. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Trinitarian Savior! Amen.

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