

Waiting after Christmas

Titus 2:11-13

By [Wiley Lowry](#)

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Let's turn now to the New Testament, to the book of Titus. We'll be in Titus chapter 2 this morning. You can find that on page 998 in the pew Bibles.

Do you realize that we are only 364 days away from Christmas? It will be here before you know it. We're used to that. We're used to the waiting that goes along with Christmas, aren't we? That's true in the church even as much as it is with the traditions that we celebrate in the world around us. We have Advent sermon series and Advent devotional books. There are Sunday school parties and the Music of Christmas. There are poinsettias and garland decorating the sanctuary. All of that is in an anticipation for Christmas Day. It's looking forward to the celebration of the birth of Jesus. We are familiar with waiting for Christmas.

Now the passage this morning from Titus chapter 2 is about waiting, except it's not about the waiting that comes before Christmas; it's about the waiting that happens after Christmas. It's about how we live now that Christ has come. How do we live in light of the events of Christ's birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension. How do we live in light of the anticipation of Christ's return at the end of history. You see, Jesus is going to come again, and there are two advents that we have to remember at Christmastime. An advent means "coming" or "arrival." There are two advents to remember. One is the coming which has already happened – that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The second is His return and the last day.

And as we wait for that day, we are called to live in a certain way, and these verses from Titus chapter 2 this morning are about that waiting. They are about how we are to live right now. And I think these verses can actually give us a new way to think about Christmas, perhaps, or maybe a different purpose from the way that we typically go about celebrating and commemorating the event of the past few days. And we'll see that, I think, in the outline that we'll use to study this passage. We'll see three things from this passage – grace, glory, and godliness. First grace, second glory, and then third, godliness. So with that in mind, let's go to the Lord in prayer and ask for Him to help us as we read and study His Word this morning. Let's pray.

Our Father, we come before You this morning and we may be distracted, we may be tired, we may be weary, we may have our minds in many different places. None of us is able to comprehend and to grasp and to apply what Your Word says to us were it not for Your Holy Spirit to teach us and to instruct us and to apply these truths to our lives. And so we ask that Your Spirit would do that work. Speak Lord, for Your servants listen. We pray all of this in Jesus' name, amen.

Titus chapter 2, verse 11:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God endures forever.

Grace

Verse 11 is a one-verse summary of the message of Christmas. In just a few words, this is why Christ was born – “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” You can hear in that verse, can’t you, an echo of what the angels announced at the coming of Jesus. They said, the angel said to Joseph in Matthew chapter 1, “She will bear a son and you shall call His name, Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” The angels announced to the shepherds outside Bethlehem, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” What were they saying? They were saying the same thing as Titus chapter 2 verse 11 – that “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” The birth of Jesus is the appearing of God’s grace. In fact, if we were going to condense the message of Christmas down even further, if we were going to condense the message of Christmas down to just one word, we could say that it is this – it’s grace. This is Christmas in a word. It’s the grace of God which has appeared.

Grace is the reason for Christmas, and grace is the reason for this letter to Titus. In this letter, Paul is writing to Titus who is on the island of Crete. Crete is the largest of the Greek islands, and it sounds like a very beautiful place. There are crystal clear waters, pink sand beaches; there are mountains that are over 8,000 feet tall. And at the time of Paul and Titus, Crete was a very prosperous place, and so it seemed like everything was going well there, and yet spiritually it was a mess. Their reputation, even among their own people, Paul says in Titus chapter 1 is that the Cretans were “liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons.” Their own people said that about themselves. In fact, there’s a word in Greek that means “to lie,” and it’s “kretidzo,” and it comes from the same word as the word, “Crete.” So literally, “to lie,” is “to Crete.” So there are all sorts of problems on this island.

There was the problem of piracy. If you think about the dominant religion that would have existed at that time, it was the gods and goddesses of the Greco-Roman mythology. There were temples and palaces that were devoted to the gods of the Greek idols, and some of the legends even said that Zeus was born on the island of Crete. And so this was a people and this was a place that was opposed to God.

Not only were their lives marked by unrighteousness and pride and sensuality and idolatry, but really they didn't want anything to do with God. They were far from God and they were fine with that. And yet what had happened? What had happened was that the grace of God, salvation, had come to the island of Crete. That's grace. Grace is God's undeserved favor and blessing on those who are opposed to Him and on those who are running away from Him. And the Cretans, they deserved God's judgment. They were unworthy of His love and blessing, and yet it was for Cretans that Paul can say that "the grace of God had appeared for salvation."

That word, "appeared," is the word from which we get our English word, "epiphany." And an epiphany, in Greek mythology, was the appearance of a Greek god to deliver the people from their enemies, to bring victory in battle. And so there was, you can say that an epiphany meant the defeat of enemies. And yet what do we have when there is an appearance or an epiphany of God's grace? It means salvation for enemies. It means salvation for all people. And that word "all" includes Cretans. That word "all" includes liars and evil beasts and lazy gluttons. It includes all of those who are opposed from God and who are running away from Him. The grace of God brings salvation to those who are in rebellion against God.

And we are all in rebellion against God. We are all far from God, apart from His saving grace, apart from resting and trusting in Jesus Christ for our salvation. We deserve God's judgment, every one of us, apart from resting in Christ for salvation. And that's what makes the message of Christmas such good news, is that God takes the initiative in saving His people, and that "God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son;" that God sent His own Son to reconcile enemies and to redeem us and to bring us into His fold and to bring us into His people, into His family. That's God's grace. And God's grace was on dramatic display in the manger in Bethlehem because we're told that God took on flesh. He took on the frailty and the weakness of human flesh to such a degree as a helpless baby in order to redeem and to save helpless sinners. He came in those humble circumstances. He came to a poor and insignificant family. He came with no room in the inn and with His birth announced to those pitiful shepherds because He came not for the impressive and the influential. No, He came for the humble and the poor in spirit. He came for those that recognize that their only hope is in the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The grace of God is our only hope.

And you've probably heard it said before that we are never so bad that we are beyond the reach of God's grace, and yet on the other hand, we are never so good that we are beyond the need of God's grace. We are never so far away that God's grace can't track us down, and we are never so cleaned up that we do not absolutely need God's grace 100%. Think about Titus. Here is Titus receiving this letter. He is the middle man. Think about Titus. Here is Titus receiving this letter. He is the middle man. He is the middle man between Paul and the Cretans. Here are the Cretans, on one hand, who were pagan and moral Gentiles, and Paul, on the other hand, he was a self-righteous, religiously devout, Jewish man. And both of them needed God's grace. God sent His Son into a world full of Cretans and into a world full of Pauls in order to save Cretans and Pauls. If the Cretans had been too lost to be found, there would have been no need for Jesus to be born. And if Paul could have stood on his own works, there would have been no need for the work of Christ. And yet both of them stood on the same ground in absolute need of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

And so do we. So do we. We all find ourselves somewhere on that spectrum. Either we come with a shameful and a guilty past, or we come with a nice, respectable, Presbyterian upbringing. Or maybe we're somewhere in between; a mixture of both. And all of us, every one of us, needs God's grace. The grace of God. It has appeared, bringing salvation for all people. Jesus is the one who has appeared. Jesus is the one who brings salvation and we desperately desire and long for grace and salvation. We need our sins forgiven. We need our consciences to be cleansed. We need to be made right with God. And Jesus does that. That's what Paul is saying here in verse 11.

Glory

But then he says there is another appearing; there is another epiphany that's yet to come in the work of Christ's salvation. It is the appearing, verse 13, "of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." You know "glory" is one of those words that it's hard to define. I find that we oftentimes define glory by what it is not. And so glory is the absence of sickness, sorry, pain and death. Glory means that there will be no more cancer or pandemic or crime or natural disasters. It's almost like we talk about glory like one of those words – maybe you've heard of them – they're called "unpaired words" or "lonely negatives." They're words in our English language that are only defined by their negative and there's not an opposite, positive word to go with them. So it's words like "impromptu" and "disgruntled." We don't ever talk about something being "promptu" or "gruntled." You know, you didn't run into any "gruntled" customers in any of your errands in the past week. They just don't work that way. It's just a negative word. And sometimes we talk about glory that way. We just define it by what it's not, in a negative sense. It's hard to talk about it in a positive sense.

What does Paul mean when he says that “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,” is yet to come? Well again, we can say what it’s not. It’s not going to be like His first coming. Jesus will not come as a baby in obscurity in order to suffer and to die. No, He will come as Lord and King with all power and all authority for everyone to see. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess, to the glory of God, and call Him “Lord.” We can say that’s what it will not be like. It won’t be like the first time. But what will it be like? What does the Bible say to us? It’s almost like the Bible, it has a hard time giving us the language and the words to capture what it means when Christ comes in His glory. Peter, James and John got a glimpse of Jesus’ glory when they saw Him; He was transfigured before them. It says that, in Matthew chapter 17, “His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as light.” That was His transfiguration. That was a glimpse of Jesus’ beauty and splendor and purity and brilliance. And how did they respond? They didn’t know what to say.

A few weeks ago, David Strain preached from Revelation chapter 4 and 5, and those words are a description there, those chapters are a description of John’s vision of Jesus on the throne in heaven. It’s a vision of the glory of Christ and about how the angels and the saints fall down and bow down and worship before Him. And the language and the imagery of those chapters are very similar to what we find in the prophets in the Old Testament in passages like Ezekiel chapter 1. Ezekiel chapter 1, it’s crazy, it’s mind boggling, all the things that are described there about the calling of Ezekiel as a prophet. There’s this bright and fiery cloud and there is lightning, there’s living creatures, and these wheels and the eyes, and there’s beryl and crystal and sapphire and a rainbow and there’s a throne, and Ezekiel says that “seated above the likeness of the throne was the likeness with a human appearance.” This is the Bible’s version of special effects. And then Ezekiel says, “Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.

It’s almost like, my sons and I went to the Egg Bowl last month, and we didn’t have tickets and so we were looking for tickets and we found, the first person we stumbled upon, he had a printout of a screenshot of a digital version of the ticket. And we weren’t quite sure if we could trust him with that printout of a screenshot of a digital version of the ticket! That’s almost what Ezekiel is saying. It’s not that he’s saying this is the glory of the Lord. No, this is “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” And what did Ezekiel do? He fell down on his face. It’s because the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord is overwhelming. It’s indescribable. It cannot be captured in words. We’ll be wondering and in awe of the glory of God for all of eternity with the angels. And we all have an instinct or a longing for glory. We have a deep desire within every one of us for awe and for beauty, for wonder and for transcendence. We are looking for glory. It’s like we are glory-hunters, and oftentimes we are looking for it in all the wrong places. We are looking for glory in experiences or in games or in products, and those things let us down over and over again. But we’ve been

made to worship, and we are looking for God's glory. We are looking for God. Every single one of us is looking for God, to have a vision of His glory.

And what Paul writes to Titus is that for those who have been saved by grace, by the grace of God in Christ Jesus, our blessed hope, our great hope is the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the glory of God in human flesh, and just as He has appeared in weakness and in humility, He will appear again in unspeakable glory. And so for us, it's fine, it's good to countdown to Christmas. It's good to mark off the days of Advent. But don't forget, don't forget that the true Advent, the current Advent for which we wait is the coming of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, in glory, in glory. And at Christmas, we need to have both of those appearings in view. Jesus came to bring grace and salvation, and He will come again to complete His work of salvation at the last day.

And we sing about that. We'll sing about it at the end of our service. We'll sing, "Joy to the World." And what does, "Joy to the World" say? It says that, "the Earth will receive her King," and "heaven and nature will sing," that, "men their songs employ; while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains, repeat the sounding joy. No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found, as far as the curse is found." That's Jesus coming in His glory. And what Matthew Henry says is that, 'Grace is God's glory begun, and glory is grace in its perfection.' So the grace of God that came with Jesus' birth will come again in perfection. It will come again in amazing wonder and glory.

Godliness

So what we have here in verse 11 and verse 13, we have grace on one side and there's glory on the other. What's in between? What's in between is waiting. There's a waiting that Paul is talking about here, and yet that waiting, it is not idle; it is not passive. No, it is active and it is engaged and it is fruitful. It's a life of godliness. Godliness is the way that we are called to live right now in this present age. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope."

One of my favorite seminary classes was Knox Chamblin's class on C.S. Lewis. And in the last lecture, Dr. Chamblin read an essay from Lewis called, "X-Mas and Christmas." And in this essay, Lewis tells the story of this make-believe island called, "Niatirb," and about this festival, this holiday that they celebrated, called, "X-Mas." And now if you were to write down "Niatirb," you would see that it's actually "Britain" spelled backwards, but when he's talking about X-Mas, he's talking about all the things that went along with this holiday. He says that they make all of this effort every year to send X-Mas cards to one another, and it's all

good and it's all fine until they receive one from someone to whom they have not sent an X-Mas card, and they have to scramble to reciprocate and to make things square with the sending of the cards. And he says that the gifts are in the same way. The gifts at X-Mas, it contains this complex holiday math at trying to guess the value of the gift that someone is going to give to you so that you can give one of like value to that same person. And he talks about all of this excitement and the commotion that goes along with X-Mas. He calls it the "X-Mas rush," and it's so much so that at the end of it, when the actual day of the holiday comes, people are too worn out to actually enjoy the day of X-Mas itself.

Does that sound familiar? What have we done with Christmas? What is Christmas for? Titus 2 tells us that when the grace of God appeared in Jesus Christ, it is to train us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and for it to teach us to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age. In other words, Christmas should impact how we live today. It should impact our character and our behavior, because if we were to have a gratitude for God's grace and an expectation for His glory, then that should produce in our lives self-control, uprightness, godliness. And some people have pointed out that in those three terms there seems to be almost a three-dimensional focus to the different aspects of the Christian life. That with self-control, it is directed inward, to ourselves, to our own desires, our motivations, our pursuits. And then uprightness is related to the word for justice, and so it relates to our love for our neighbors, that we would treat one another with kindness, integrity, honesty, compassion and generosity. And then a godly life deals with our relationship to God, so that our lives should be marked by worship and devotion and piety.

What is that? What is a life of self-control, uprightness, and godliness? It is a life that looks like Jesus' life. And it probably can't make that tight of categories with those three words, and yet we can see something in what Paul is saying here – that there is a comprehensiveness about a life of holiness or sanctification. It touches everything that we do and every part of our being. There is something about the demand of godliness in this book, in Scripture, all of Scripture, that it's demanding. Isn't it? In fact, if you were to go back through the book of Titus and read through this short little letter, you would find that Paul has exhortations to the Christians in Crete to old men and to old women, to young men and to young women, to husbands and wives and bondservants. And we might even find as we read his exhortations to the different people in the church there, that it's almost a crushing standard to try to live up to. And one of the favorite words that Paul uses in the book of Titus is, "good works." He says, "Be zealous for good works. Be devoted to good works."

How can we live like that? How can we say "No" to the ways of the present age and say "Yes" to the ways of God in this present age? How do we do that? Here's how. It's not by working for our salvation. It's not by trying to build up enough good works to be saved. No, it's by living a new life by faith in Christ Jesus. It's by living a salvation life, a life that begins with the grace of God and is

carried forth by the grace of God and is looking forward to one day the glory of God. It's by living out the good news that comes to us in these verses that we've read this morning. That's how we live what Paul calls us to live. You know Titus chapter 2, 11 to 13, these verses this morning, they are some of the richest verses and some of the most profound and most precious truths in all of the Bible, and yet I think if we could say it this way, that they may not even be the best verses in the book of Titus. If we were to flip over a few verses to Titus chapter 3 verse 4, it says that, "When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

That says it all, doesn't it? That's what changes lives. That's what changes our lives. That's what enables us to live lives of godliness to the praise of God's grace in this present age. You see, if we come to Christmas and Christmas becomes an excuse for us to indulge ourselves and to get all caught up in man-made traditions, see, that's not just a distortion of Christmas; that's a contradiction of the Christian life. What Paul is calling us to here, he's calling us to remember the birth of Jesus and to look back. Look back to the grace of God that has appeared, bringing salvation for all people. And he's calling for us to look ahead, to look ahead to the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. And then to wait, to wait by living a transformed, a renewed life; to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly in this present age. Thank God, that by His grace, He can make it so.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we can only start to take in all that is contained in these few words from Titus chapter 2 this morning. And yet we ask that by Your Spirit, You would work them deep within our hearts, and as You help us to trust and to apply and to live out the words that You have called us to do here in this passage, that You would help us, that You would enable us, and that You would receive all the praise and glory for it. We pray all of this in Jesus' name, amen.

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