

Truth Leading to Godliness

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[0 : 0 0] One of the real joys over these past few months for us as a church family has been receiving! so many new members. If you were here this morning, you will have heard Shores mention it in his prayer.

It has been such a wonderful, wonderful joy. And just a few months back, I was talking with someone who was about to profess their faith and come into membership in the church here. They had not long become a Christian, come to Christ, and as we were talking, they asked me a wonderful question, a wonderful question. I can still remember exactly where I was when they asked this question.

They said, how do I live now that I am a follower of Jesus? I love him. I know him. He's my Savior and Lord. But what does life look like now? What does it mean for me as I turn on the television? What does it mean for me as I go to the cinema? What does it mean for my hobbies and sports and family and friends and work into all the different nooks and crannies of my life? How do I now live? Because I know Jesus changes everything, everything. In effect, they were saying, I know following Jesus changes everything, so how do I live a godly, fruitful life full of God-glorifying works in all that I do? It was a wonderful question.

And as we start this new evening series on Titus, that is a main concern right at the front of Paul's mind as he writes to Titus. Verse 5, Paul tells Titus he's left him on Crete to appoint new elders in the church. But as we go through the letter, we'll see that Paul's concern for Titus and the new elders that are going to be appointed there and for the whole church is that they live fruitful, godly lives on Crete. If you have a copy of the letter in front of you now, that'll be really helpful to have it open there. It fits over two pages. And certainly, I would encourage you, we're going to be in Titus for a few weeks in the evening. Do try and read the whole thing through. It's very, very short, but to read through it through the week will help you get to know it. And we're going to see that theme coming up again. We see it a lot. Chapter 2, verse 14, Paul writes that believers are to be zealous for good works. Chapter 3, verse 1, the believers are to be ready for every good work.

Chapter 3, verse 8, they're to be devoted to good works. Chapter 3, verse 14, they're to be devoted to do good and help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful. So, not being unfruitful is meaning what?

[3 : 12] Being fruitful. But before we look at these that we're going to look at this evening, I just want us to stop and get to know this letter a little bit, get to know Titus, get to know Crete, and ask, well, why is Paul needing to say that? Why does he need to write to Titus to say that we want the believers of the church there to be fruitful, to be zealous for good works? Why does the theme come up again and again? Well, I think we're going to see this lots over these coming next few weeks, and we'll explore it in more detail, but there are perhaps at least two big reasons. First, there's the surrounding culture there on Crete. Chapter 1, verse 12, one of their own prophets wrote that Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons. I was saying to the staff team as we were talking about preaching through this and working through this, I thought, what an amazing thing to have inscripturated if that was your people right. Imagine if it was us in Aberdeen. Aberdonians are, okay, we won't go further, but imagine, right, what Cretans, one of their poets, liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons, what a thing. In other words, the culture around this church is people who hate and distort the truth, they are brutish, they hate God, they're lazy, and they're overindulgent. Do you know of any cultures that sound a little bit like that today? I do have a feeling as we go through this letter, we're going to learn that Crete 2,000 years ago isn't so far away from our own culture today as you might expect, and that cultural pressure on the church is real. When you go out to work and find, for example, people always arriving late, leaving early, skiving off from work, and you're the only one not doing it, it's hard, isn't it? Pressure, pressure. But the second area of pressure, which perhaps is even harder for the believers there, is the false teaching going on. Chapter 1, verse 10, we have mention of the circumcision party, and that they are empty talkers, deceivers. Verse 14 of chapter 1, people devoted to

Jewish myths. Verses 15 and 16, speaking about living lives which are producing fruit. And if you're a Christian living there, you might be thinking, well, what am I meant to do? Who am I meant to listen to?

And so that's the situation that these believers here are finding themselves in. So what is it that is going to lead to godliness, to fruitfulness, to them being zealous for good works? What's going to lead to that? Well, the main answer that Paul gives in this letter is that they need to know it is the true gospel that produces godliness. It is knowing gospel truth that leads to godliness. Simply right doctrine, right living, faith and practice belong right together. Now, we're going to see that again and again throughout this letter, but here in our verses this evening, we get kind of that in microcosm form.

Do you see it there in verse 1? Paul, a servant of God, an apostle of Christ Jesus, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness, or we might translate which leads to godliness, which leads to godliness. And so what Paul gives Titus here in these first few verses functions something like a little bit like an overture at the start of a great symphony or a musical. Do you know how you arrive into the theater and before the music starts, what happens before the curtain goes up, the band begin to play, don't they? And they play some of the key notes or key music or key melodic line, which is going to be kind of expanded on later on in the symphony or musical or whatever it is. And what Paul writes here to Titus functions a little bit of like that. He gives us some of the key notes, and there it is there. It is the truth that leads to godliness.

And what especially Paul wants to focus on in these few words is the content of the truth that leads to godliness. He gives them the core truth of the gospel, which is going to produce fruit. And so we're just going to look at two questions this evening from these verses. We're going to spend most of our time on the first one and a brief time on the second one. What is the first question then is, what is that truth?

[8 : 18] What is the true gospel that Paul lays out here in these verses? That's our first point here. What is that, those notes that Paul strikes? And he gives us that gospel as we look at it here in three movements, if you like, across time. The past, the present, and future. The past reality of the gospel, the present and the future. Past, present, future aspects. Or what God has done, is doing, and will do.

So firstly then, the past reality of what God has done for us in the gospel. Let's read again from verse 1. Paul, a servant of God, an apostle of Christ Jesus, for the sake of the faith of God's elect, and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness in the hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began. In those short few lines, there are two references to what God did in the past. Did you see them? It is speaking of God's election. He chose a people, the elect, and he promised eternal life before the ages began. The glorious truth of the gospel is that it started, God promised salvation before creation ever was. God, before the creation of anything, before he spoke and said, let there be light, and hung the stars in the sky, set his love upon a people for himself. I wonder if you remember how it felt being chosen for something at school. I think normally it felt pretty good. Chosen, perhaps, for the best team in the playground.

Chosen by the teacher for an important job. Chosen to be the line leader. Was anyone here ever a line leader? I used to work as a teacher. When I worked as a teacher, the kids loved leading the line. They loved it. Not necessarily sure why, but they did. They always wanted to lead the line. Chosen for something good. And we were always very thankful. How much more then? How much more then? If we're chosen by God from all eternity, are we going to be humbled and thankful and want to live for him? And that in turn will lead us to want to honor and live for him in our lives. You see, if you remember at school, the kids who were chosen always wanted to live out that role to the best they could. That captain chose me for his team. Don't worry, I'll never let you down. The teacher chose me to lead the line. I am going to be the best line leader and door holder opener like there was never before. I will hold doors as no child ever has. Remembering our election will lead us to want to live godly lives. Obviously not to earn our election, right? By definition we can't. It is God's sovereign choice. But God chose us. God chose us. And in light of that, we're going to want to live for him. And here's the amazing thing. At school, when we were chosen to be the line leader or whatever, run an errand for the teacher, or we were chosen to be on the team, normally we were chosen what? For our merit. We had sort of earned it. But no, God's choosing is choosing those who could never earn it, those who could never deserve it. He set his love on us.

It is a difficult doctrine to think about our election and God's sovereign choice, but it is one that is to send us to our needs in glory. I was speaking in a church a few weeks ago, speaking from Malachi chapter 1 about God choosing Jacob, God choosing a people, and had a wonderful conversation with an elderly saying to the end, he came up and just said, don't we marvel, marvel that God would set his love on us. The reality of what God has done in the past. But there is something else that he's done in the past. He chose us, and he also sent Jesus to save us. Paul says he preaches the word which, verse 3, was entrusted to him by the command of God our Savior. And then verse 4, to Titus, my true child in a common faith, grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Front and center of the true gospel is that Christ Jesus is our Savior. It sounds so simple to say it, but it is the most important thing. Perhaps you're here this evening and know very little about God and the gospel and who Jesus is. But please take this away. Please take this away, if nothing else, to know that Jesus is our Savior. He is the one who comes to offer you salvation. It is the most important thing. We had a birthday in our house this week, and normally when birthdays come around in our house, the first question that normally gets asked is, what kind of cake are you going to have?

[13:57] What kind of cake if we're having? I wonder what kind of cake you like in your house. Well, if I had said a few weeks ago when we talked about a birthday, well, actually, that for this birthday, there's going to be no cake. There's going to be no cake. It would have caused an uproar, a total uproar. At least in our home, you cannot have a birthday without having a cake. Well, dear friends, in a much, much greater way, and in a totally inseparable way. You do not have, you cannot have Christianity without Jesus as Savior. If you've been in one of our life groups throughout this year, we've seen that again and again, haven't we? That Paul, who is the apostle and servant of God here, traveled around and did what?

He preached Christ. He taught Christ. He persuaded people Jesus is the Christ. At any teaching, any preaching, even from a place that calls itself a church, even with a pulpit and a person at the front who might be called a reverend, if they do not preach Christ, who is our Savior, to save us from our sin, who died and rose again from the dead, then there is no gospel there. No, Jesus is our Savior. For those of us in church all our lives, it sounds so simple.

Of course, Jesus is the Savior. But dear friends, in a thousand different ways across the world, the culture which does not know God and false teachers will stand up in pulpits or out there in the marketplace and deny the reality or seek to twist the truth of Jesus as a Savior. Oh, Jesus, surely just a good moral teacher. Oh, Jesus, surely just an example. Oh, a historical figure, but not a Savior. There is no gospel if Jesus is not our Savior. No, the true gospel, the true doctrine that leads to godliness looks back on what God has done. God has saved us. The Father chose us, and the Father sent the Son, and the Son came to save. Brothers and sisters, that is the truth on which we stand. May we never, ever be moved from it. The glorious reality of what God has done for us.

Second aspect, then, of the gospel. Paul kind of moves us into the present. The past reality of what God has done. He chose us and saved us. The present reality is of what God has made us now, who God has made us now.

And so, who are we? Verse 1, Paul, an apostle, for what? The sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth. That is, Paul is saying we belong to God, united by faith, and know the truth about Him. Faith and knowledge of the truth are closely linked, but they're kind of distinct enough for Paul to use both terms. I think he's saying something like this. We are people of faith, trust in God for our salvation, and our knowledge of the truth, then, is growing as we gain knowledge of Him. And of course, that is something only God can do. Perhaps we could illustrate it this way. In marriage, my wife and I, we belong to each other. We are united in marriage, but our knowing about each other, it doesn't stop on our wedding day. No, we are to grow and knowledge and love for each other.

[17 : 48] And I think Paul is saying something like that here. What are we as Christians? We're those united to Christ by faith, and our knowledge of Him is to grow. We are to be people of the truth.

And I think we get an idea of that, actually, from Paul's own ministry. How does Paul describe himself a servant? Or actually, if you see the little one and look down at the bottom as a slave, a *doulos*, he is a servant, and he is an apostle of Christ Jesus. That is, he is being called and appointed by the Lord Jesus Himself to tell people about Him, that they may grow in knowledge of Him.

Now, we're going to see the reality of God's people needing taught come up again and again in this letter, but it is worth noting now. God appoints and calls people to teach His Word.

And so, here this evening, as we're going to see very much next week, ruling elders, ministers, what is your job? Your job, the goal, the laser-sharp end of your ministry is to point people to Jesus and to help them grow in knowledge of the truth of Him, grow more like Him. That is the task to which we've been given the gospel handed on from Christ and the apostles to men like Titus, to other elders, all the way down to you. That was the goal of Paul's ministry, and it is to be the goal of ours.

That is the task to what we've been called. And so, dear brothers that are elders, that is the task we've been given, so we're to stick to it, to point people to Jesus and to help them to know Him more.

[19 : 35] And notice, Paul calls himself what? He calls himself a servant, a servant, a slave, doulos. The picture is the lowliest job in all society. I'm kind of hesitant to give examples of that today, but what would you say is the kind of lowliest job here in our society today? What would you say is the lowliest thing? Well, Paul is saying that, but actually under that, under that, so lowly, so low down. Christ is the master. Christ is the captain, and it is Paul's duty and joy to serve Him by pointing others to Jesus and helping them grow. So, godliness will come as we grow in knowledge of who God is.

And so, I just have one question. Do you know God this evening? I said we're to be marked as people of faith, but maybe this evening you do not have faith in God. Well, the invitation of the whole Bible, the invitation of Jesus is to come and trust Him for salvation. Come and know Him today. Place your life on Him and have life. But if you would say that you do know God, let me ask you this evening, do you desire to grow in knowledge and the truth of Him, to know more of Him? Think about that person that asked me right back at the start of this sermon. I used that example. They said, how do I grow more like Jesus? How do I live for Him now? When was the last time you asked yourself that? When was the last time you asked an elder, a Christian friend, that? Do you desire to grow in knowledge and truth of Jesus?

Dear friends, if not this evening, then ask the Lord Jesus to show Himself to you more. Perhaps your love for God has grown cold. If so, come again to His Word. Remember, we are people of faith united to Christ.

Ask Him to teach you more of Himself, and He will do that. Speak to one of the elders here. Speak to me, Joe or Donald. One of us, we would be delighted to get alongside you, to read God's Word with you, that you would know more of who God has made you to be today. The gospel, the truth that leads to godliness, the gospel points to the work of God in the past. He chose us and saved us. The present reality of who God has made us. We are people of faith who want to grow in knowledge of the truth. And thirdly, then, it points to a future reality, and it is the future reality of heaven.

Paul points us forward to the sure hope of heaven. Do you see it there in verse 2? Knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness or leads to godliness in hope of eternal life, in hope of eternal life. That is just another way of saying we're living in hope of heaven.

[22 : 33] The true gospel which produces godliness also looks forward to heaven and is motivated for godliness by knowing that heaven is our home, that heaven is our destination. Yes, we may live in Crete, but one day I'm going to glory. Yes, we may live in Aberdeen or wherever we're from, but if you belong to Jesus, heaven is your home. That is where you're heading.

It's holiday season, and if I saw a car, or if you saw a car full of beach towels, buckets and spades, blow-up lilos, disposable barbecues, but the driver said, actually, we're off on a skiing holiday. It would be a little bit of a shock. Hang on. It looks like your destination should be the beach, not the ski slopes. Likewise, if we saw a car full of skis and ski jackets and face goggles and whatever else it is you need to go skiing, I don't know, but you need a lot of stuff, do you not, right?

Those of you who are skiers know, right? You've got loads of stuff that you need to take with it, and you saw a car full of all that kind of stuff, but the driver said, actually, I'm off to the beach. We're going to Mallorca for the week. We're going to sunbathe. We'd kind of be left scratching our heads. You'd say to those people, you're not really ready. You're not prepared. You're not dressed. You're not living for the destination. You're going skiing. Live now to be ready for that.

You're going on a beach holiday. Live now to be ready for the sun. We're heading to heaven, an eternal life without sin. Live now to be ready for heaven as our home. Our faith now today is to be fed by remembering heaven, thinking of heaven, remembering where we're going. And the hope of heaven is not a kind of woolly thing, like hoping it doesn't rain too much for the next few days.

No, the hope of heaven that we have in the gospel is a sure expectation for those in Christ. It is coming. So, dear friends, let me ask you, when did you last think of heaven?

[24 : 39] When did you last think of the hope of eternal life with God? When did you last think upon seeing the Lord Jesus face to face? When did you think about life, last think about life in the new heavens, in the new earth, where there is no sin, where you can never be in the presence of sin, where you'll no longer be able to sin? Perhaps some of us very recently have thought about our death and the hope of heaven, but perhaps some of us, it was a long time ago, or it's not a daily reality to look forward to where we're going. Some of you might have heard the saying, we can be so heavenly-minded, we're of no earthly use. Do people still say that? I used to hear a lot of that. I don't know if you still hear it, but I remember hearing that. But that's not what the Bible teaches. We are to be heavenly-minded so that we can be of earthly use, people marked by faith and sure hope of heaven.

So Paul has shown Titus the true gospel, what God has done in the past, has made us to be in the present and will do in the future if you belong to him. And it is thinking upon and growing more in knowledge of God and of that gospel which is going to lead to godliness. And so very briefly, having thought, well, what is that that we're going to see throughout Titus, those truths that we're just going to sit in and unpack over these coming weeks? Paul just wants to tell Titus one more thing, and that is that we can be sure of it. So that's our second question. That is the true gospel, but can we be sure?

Remember, they're in a culture that denies this. There are false teachers saying something else, so can we be sure? And Paul gives them three reasons that we can be. Firstly, this hope of eternal life, and indeed this whole gospel, we can be sure of it because first, verse 2, God promised it. He promised it. We've thought about that briefly already, but we know heaven and the glory of the gospel is true because God promised it. And dear friends, that is something worth holding on very tightly to in the Christian life, that God always keeps his promises. He always keeps his promises. Soon, our leaves on our trees will turn to orange and fall to the ground, but God's promises are never like that, though they are evergreen. Dear friends, rest in that this evening. Rest in that. Those who are weary, tired, doubting, trust his promise. God promised these things, and his promises never fail. Secondly, we have God's promises, but secondly, we know this is going to happen because God doesn't lie. God doesn't lie there in verse 2, in hope of eternal life, which God who never lies promised. Now, that is a very important idea in this letter, the theme of truth and falsehood. As we've already seen, that the Cretans are described as liars. And so, Paul writes to Titus to make very clear in the start that no, God does not lie. God does not lie. No, God always tells the truth.

Dear friends, it is a wonderful truth for us to bask in and rejoice in that God cannot lie, for he cannot disown himself or do anything against his character. That is why we can trust every jot and tittle, every word of this book. That's why we know it's inspired, because God's wrote it, and he cannot lie. God wrote it, and he cannot lie.

Again, friends, just let that refresh you this evening. Turn on the news, listen to the radio, look at the world around us, full of stories of people lying, governments with broken promises, husbands off at concerts with broken vows, news that we're not even sure is real half of the time.

[28 : 57] Dear friends, each and every day, you have the privilege to open your Bibles and to meet God, who is truth, who is truth. He cannot lie. Thirdly, then, thirdly, we can be sure of the truth of the gospel, because God promised it, and God does not lie. And thirdly, and perhaps surprisingly, we can be sure of the truth of the gospel, the hope of heaven and all God has done, because it's been brought to light through preaching, preaching, which has been entrusted to Paul. They were in verse 3, and at the proper time, that is, the hope of heaven, all that God promised in the gospel, verse 3, at the proper time, it was manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God, our Savior. Isn't it interesting that verse 2 and 3, that the hope of heaven and eternal life, that they're made manifest through preaching. And so, actually, Paul is saying something very strong about preaching here in its content. He's saying heaven and the gospel is certain, we can be sure of it because of God's character, yes, but because he has appointed preachers as means of telling people about it. And so, let me put it this way. When you see Joe and Donald come into this pulpit, come up here and preach every week, we should be reminded that heaven is real. We should be reminded that the gospel is true. Why? Because they have been called and appointed to preach a message which is not their own, but one promised by God who never lies and who it came to us from Christ and his apostles. That is the message they're preaching. When Prince Charles became King Charles III, and you saw heralds at St. James's Palace or on the Royal Mile, heralding, reading from a scroll, there is a new king, you knew it to be true because this is the reality of how that message gets out. And so, when you see Christ in the true gospel being proclaimed from pulpits, you can be sure the message is true because it's the appointed means for heralding the news of Jesus. They can be sure of the true gospel message because of God's promise, God's character, and God's appointed means. Preaching which points to the true gospel is a way of saying, heaven is coming, the gospel is real. And so, what should that do? What should that do?

Well, it should breed and grow confidence to trust God's word and live it out, should it not? To live in response to it, to live godly and fruitful lives, because with the ears of faith, I know it to be true. And so, dear friends, when you're tempted to sin, when we're tempted to falsehood, to a life that's ungodly, to disobeying God, when we're tempted in any of those ways, we're to look back, to look back at what God has done, to look what we are now, to look forward to the hope of heaven, to look to the character of God and the means of God, and to know that all God promises is true.

And so, when we're tempted by those words of the devil, did God really say? Did God really say, I have to forgive my neighbor? Did God really say that sin will be present in me till heaven, and I might need help being rid of it? Did God really say, I can't have other small idols in my heart? Did God really say, I should gather with his people on a Sunday? Right, the list goes on and on.

But then, what am I to do? I'm to think upon God, God, Father, Son, and Spirit. Think upon him. Remember, he always keeps his promises. He cannot lie, and that I can trust his word to follow him.

And so, dear friends, let me encourage you this evening to trust God, to trust him, to listen to his word over any false teaching or words of our culture which would seek to take us away from him.

[33 : 08] Trust him. Don't give in to the prevailing mood of the culture around us. And if you strayed from Jesus this evening, come back to him again. Life is only found in him. His word can be trusted, and that means you can be forgiven and restored. And so, if you're asking this evening, how do I live a godly, fruitful life for God in this world? Go to the gospel. Go to the gospel. Soak it in and soak it and bask in the light of what Christ has done for you and where we're going with the hope of heaven.

And dear friends, if you're not asking it, then you too should go to the gospel. For it was there, once again, you will see the beauty of Christ and the truth of the gospel which changes lives. Amen. Let's pray.

Amen.