

Saved for Good Works in the World

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[0 : 00] Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?! Jesus was the master, wasn't he, of the memorable turn of phrase.

! Imagine walking through the forest and walking past the thick brambles, the nettles, and peeking out from the thorns, you see a fat, juicy bunch of grapes.

That would be strange, wouldn't it? Or walking through a field full of weeds, scratching your legs and ankles, and as you kick the prickles out of the way, off-roll fat, juicy figs.

Now, I know that that's never happened to you. That does not happen, does it? And even if it did, would you trust the grapes and figs that grew from those thorns and thistles?

Well, as with plants, so with people, says Jesus. So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit.

[1 : 08] Nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. As we've gone through Paul's letter to Titus together over the last few weeks, I hope that you've seen that that is the big truth that stands behind everything, really, that Paul wants Titus to pass on to the church in Crete.

Healthy gospel roots bear healthy gospel fruits. Christians who are being fed and watered with the truth of the trustworthy gospel of God are Christians who should be growing in godliness and good works.

The last verse in our passage tonight says that quite plainly, verse 8. It could, I think, be taken fairly as a summary of the whole letter. Paul gives a glorious unpacking of the gospel, and then he says, verse 8, the saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

What we believe and how we live, he's saying, go hand in hand. Now, I guess most of us would love to spend all our time tonight swimming in the depths of that healthy gospel in verses 4 to 7, and we will spend a good part of our time there.

But we can't forget that on either side of those verses, or on both banks of that beautiful gospel, Paul is clear that there is a world in need of the beautiful works that grow out of that beautiful gospel.

[2 : 53] And Paul wants Titus and therefore all preachers to remind the church of our high calling as Christians, and so to insist that we commit ourselves to doing good to all people because of God's goodness and grace first to us.

So far in the letter, Paul's focus has been what goes on inside the church, so putting what remained into order, as he says in 1 verse 5. And so we've looked, haven't we, at healthy gospel fruit in church leadership, chapter 1, and we've looked at healthy gospel fruit in church family life in chapter 2.

But now Paul is stretching, isn't he, us to see what goes on beyond the four walls of the church. This is healthy gospel fruit for life in a big, wide world.

And so our passage tonight is about how we deal with our government, with our neighbors. In fact, it says, with all people, with everyone. And his point tonight is that we are saved, brothers and sisters, certainly not by our good works, but definitely for good works towards all people.

We are saved for good works in the world. So let's see that together, beginning with that reminder in verses 1 and 2, that as Christians we are to be good to all.

[4 : 20] Just have a look there with me. Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy towards all people.

Now notice that Paul assumes that Titus' hearers already know this, because he is to remind them. So if you're already switching off, because you're thinking, I've heard sermons on this before, know

it all.

Well, I have it on Paul's authority, but you need to hear it again. Which is interesting, isn't it? Think about it. Why in such a short letter, that fits literally on the two pages of your Bible open in front of you, a short letter, why would Paul feel the need to tell Titus to remind the church of something they've already covered?

Doesn't Paul get just how long Titus' to-do list has become, not least since he began reading his letter? Can't we save revision for when things are a bit easier, Paul? Why would Paul ask Titus to remind Christians on Crete that they are to be good to all?

Well, presumably because he knows that they are not, but it is important enough that it needs to be put right sooner rather than later. Remind the church urgently to have a healthy gospel posture towards the world.

[5 : 52] Obey its authorities. Bad mouth no one. Show all kinds of humility, gentleness, forbearance to all people. Be ready for every good work.

Some of you will remember, I hope, the two pram settings. Remember this? We're about to go through it all again. What are the two settings on a pram? If the child is facing towards you, so the jargon says the child is parent-facing, but if you switch the seat around and the child is facing out the way, well, they are world-facing.

This is a call, isn't it? To be a world-facing church, world-facing Christians, not closed in on itself, not against the big bad world, but in fact for the big bad world.

It's love your neighbor as yourself time in the streets and offices and council offices of Crete. Now, if that's Christianity 101, possibly the most famous thing Jesus ever said, isn't it?

Love your neighbor as yourself. Why weren't they doing that? It's not because they don't know it. They do. So why? I think this is actually really important for us to get under the skin of so that we get it and we don't actually end up doing the same thing.

[7 : 19] So remember why this is. There are wolves on Crete, not furry ones, but false ones, false teachers around the church. And remember that they are circumcision party wolves, or if you like, Jesus plus wolves.

We saw that back in chapter one. So their message is, yeah, Jesus gets you most of the way, but there's still a little bit for you to do to get properly across the line with God, or at least to be sure that you are.

Here's God's rule book. Follow this, and then you'll be fine. Now, Paul has said to Titus in no uncertain terms that he's to make good use of his proverbial shepherd's crook to deal with this problem.

Rebuke them sharply that they might be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

So that is bad for the church. But say those lies had got into the bloodstream of the church. What might be some of the symptoms?

[8 : 32] If I've done something that I can point to and say, that's why I'm a real Christian, that's why I'm really different from other people, well, how might you start to view people then who aren't a Christian?

Say, your neighbors, people you work with, the Creek Council. I've worked so hard to become a proper Christian. even these guys could never do what I've done.

In fact, they're not even interested in living a better life. Look at them, those evil beasts, those lazy gluttons. And you know what? Even if they were interested, they don't really have what it takes.

In fact, this whole island is really too far gone for the gospel. Tell you what, we'll live our life and let them live theirs.

And if they were to cross our path, if they have a problem with us, if they were to complain that we park on the street on a Sunday, or if they were to laugh at us because we go to church, well, we'll show them because we're Christians.

[9 : 35] And they are totally clueless. Basically, world, we're better than you, so we don't respect you or love you.

That's the fruit of Jesus plus. Friends, substitute in whatever it is you sometimes think makes you a real proper Christian that isn't the gospel and see if there isn't a seed of that superiority and pride in you.

The culture you were born into, the upbringing that you had, the church you were converted in, the number of years you've been a Christian, the rules or the habits, practices that you follow each day, the number of ways you serve the church, the number of Christian friends you have, Christians who look up to you, the amount of Bible knowledge you have, the Christian conferences that you attend, the Christian circles that you move in.

Brothers and sisters, the Jesus plus whatever anti-gospel will only ever feed our pride and so cause us to look down on others in the church and write off others outside the church.

Never ever will it grow the fruit Paul describes in verses 1 and 2, which is a humble servant posture towards a lost world.

[11:01] That includes, he says, submission and obedience to secular, or even in this case, pagan authorities. Paul says, the gospel teaches us not to begrudge the council or the government the legitimate authority that they have to order society, make rules, collect taxes, provide services.

And before we write Paul off as, you know, what does he know? He didn't live in the 21st century. Well, I think it's safe to say that Aberdeen City Council is more sympathetic to having us here than the council or whatever on Crete and the governors were sympathetic to having the church on their island.

You know, sometimes as Christians we're quicker, aren't we, to talk about the government and, you know, perhaps the threat of persecution or when should we disobey the law rather than actually the normal, everyday, respect and obedience, the Bible says that we're to give to the government.

That's really countercultural in our day, our anti-authority culture, not to resent but to respect who God's put in charge simply because that's who God has put in charge, whether they're Christians or not.

one commentator says helpfully, I think, being ready for every good work means that our submission to worldly authorities isn't to be resigned, bitter and complaining.

[12:37] Instead, it means being loyal and contributing members of society, by which he goes on to explain means using our energy, intelligence and gifts in support of a cause that's bigger than ourselves, which in this case is the good of our whole society, every person with whom we live.

Keeping laws that make life complicated, paying taxes and parking charges, following health and safety, being on a PTA or community council, befriending and helping those with social support needs, thanking the police and emergency services, praying for our MPs and MSPs, that all takes time and effort.

Doesn't it? And maybe some of it we feel is actually time wasted. But actually, Paul says it's not. We should be ready and willing to do it, every good work, every good work, as God gives us opportunity.

In fact, that was a big part of the early church's defense against state prosecution when it came only a couple of generations after Titus. Guys like Justin Martyr wrote to the emperor saying words to the effect of this.

Say what you want about what we believe, but Christians are a net gain for society. We keep the laws, we're part of the social safety net, we work for the benefit of others because we're Christians, because our God tells us to do so.

[14:09] Your posture in the world, brothers and sisters, should be such that the authorities want Christians around, even if they think we're mad. them with our neighbors, our colleagues, parents at the school gate, strangers on the bus, all people.

We're to speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, or to be peaceable, to be gentle, to show perfect courtesy towards all people.

We rub up against people all the time, don't we? All the time, sometimes we're inconvenienced by someone, get a hard time from someone. Paul is clear, we're never ever to give as good as we get. Spreading a bad report about someone, even if it's just telling loads of people what that person did to me. Trying to get the last word in an argument because I have to prove that I'm right.

Being angry, bitter, holding a grudge, being violent or threatening because they deserve it. No, brothers and sisters, no, when we get trouble, we're to give back the opposite, says Paul.

[15:18] Perfect or every kind of forbearance, gentleness, humility, courtesy. Do you know you can tell a Christian by those things because those are things that a Jesus plus gospel will never grow, but which Paul says Christians must grow and will grow towards all people.

just take a minute before we leave this point and actually do it. Don't just look at me as if you're doing it. Bring to mind, just think for a minute about the hardest, the trickiest person in your life. Just pick out that person in your mind. Who makes life hard for you? Who do you struggle with? Paul says you are to be good to that person.

Because you are to be good to all people. I wonder, brothers and sisters, are you in the world facing position tonight, ready for every good work towards those God's place in your life, from HMRC to that difficult person and everyone in between?

Where do you need to change your posture towards the world out there? If you know you need to, which I imagine is many of us, if not all of us, to a greater or lesser degree, the two questions we might now be asking are, how can I do that?

[16:47] Or, why should I do that? And to that, Paul says this, our second point, the reason to be good to all is that God has graciously saved us in his goodness.

You think that person's impossible, says Paul, well hang on a minute, don't you remember what you used to be like, verse 3? We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

You might be powering on in the Christian life now, growing in godliness and good works, but you didn't used to be. Not so long ago, you had zero wisdom, rejected God's wisdom, and followed the world's wisdom instead.

You think you're better than everyone else out there? Only five minutes ago, in God's eternal timeline, you were no different, a slave to your various passions and pleasures. You lived under the thumb of your own desires, he's saying, you were carried along by every swell of emotion, you obeyed every passing want.

That's not the gospel, that's the Disney gospel, isn't it? Follow your heart and be free. But friends, try not following your heart and see how far you get before your passions and pleasures rein you back in.

[18:23] and say, no, no, you think we serve you, you are serving us, get back in line. That was you and me, that was us, says Paul, just like everyone, a slave of our own desires, no difference.

Think you're so kind. Think back to when you passed your days in malice and envy and hatred and rivalry. you never thought of yourself as a bad person, but if you were to rewind your life now on a TV screen and hit pause at any random minute, Paul is saying, I reckon that you would have been thinking something bad about someone or be jealous of someone or want to get ahead of someone. Put yourself first. That's how we passed our days, says Paul. That's how we spent our time. And before we hear tonight say, well, but remember, context is king, those cretins, they were way worse than us.

Well, who is Paul talking about at the start of verse three? You nasty cretins were like that. No, for we ourselves were once like that.

Paul's talking about himself, Titus, the church on Crete, every Christian. Whatever you want to say about those people now, says Paul, you could say about me and you, not so long ago.

[19:51] He was thinking about this. It would be hard to be friends with somebody like verse three, wouldn't it? Well, I'm sorry to say that you were, and I was, and I am.

Brothers and sisters, if we think there was something about us that God took an interest in, some quality or potential in you, such that he decided to save you instead of your neighbor or friend, you bought the Jesus plus gospel.

Jesus plus my natural worthiness to be saved by God. Wasn't I the obvious choice? You were no different, says Paul, no different from the people that you look down on now, the most difficult person in your life, no different.

So why are we Christians if it's not that? Well, drink this in, drink this in, look at these verses, four to seven, read, just follow it with me in your Bible.

Why are you a Christian? Why are you different from anyone else? But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, 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.

[21:27] Friends, if you're a Christian, what an amazing thing has happened to you. What an amazing thing. Paul couldn't be clearer, could he? God did not save us because of works that we

have done.

So if you're a Christian here tonight, it is not because of you in any way. You did not contribute anything to your salvation, and you have not paid God back for it either.

You do not add to it. You can't. Look how full it is. Why am I a Christian then? Verse 4, because of God's own goodness, because of literally his love towards humanity, because of his mercy, because of his grace.

Brothers and sisters, God, our Savior, saved us because of everything in him and nothing in us. In the words of one writer I read this week, we were rescued from a pit deeper than we could crawl from, saved from darkness greater than our light could penetrate, delivered from sin stronger than we could control.

See how mighty, how full our salvation is, all three persons of the Godhead at work together, the loving kindness of God the Father, the mediation of God the Son, the regeneration and renewal of God the Holy Spirit.

[22 : 56] See how in the same breath, Paul calls God our Savior and Jesus Christ our Savior. Friends, Jesus Christ, he is our God and our only Savior.

Can you see this is not a halfway gospel, a watered down gospel. We are not saved by nice Jesus doing a deal behind the mean father's back or a loving father giving up his unwilling son to be crucified on a cross or the Holy Spirit giving us something that the Father and the Son can't or won't give to us.

No, each person of the triune God is fully and gladly at work for our salvation. The whole Godhead conspires together to rescue people like, verse three, twisted, hard, hateful, disobedient people like me and you and everyone we know.

Why? Purely because he so loved a world that had turned so far from him. So what's the real equation of the gospel then?

Jesus plus nothing equals everything. We do not add to Jesus to be saved. He does all the work.

[24 : 22] We simply put our trust in him and it is his finished work on our behalf that saves us. He saved us from the penalty of our sin, which is the death he took for us on the cross.

But the point I think Paul wants especially to grasp is that in his sheer grace, God has saved us from the power of sin.

Verses five and six, that washing and regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus is speaking about when he says to another Jesus plus teacher named Nicodemus, you must be born again.

That's what the word regeneration means, a rebirth, a recreation. Nicodemus is confused. How can someone go back in the womb and be born again? But it is not a physical rebirth that Jesus is talking about, but a spiritual rebirth of our inner person.

Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, says the psalmist. One not chained and stained by sin, but one that is washed clean and set free to love as you created it to love, to serve, to want what you made me to want.

[25 : 42] I read a book earlier this year, the sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, if you've read that. It's about a woman who at the start of the story is taken captive and kept in horrendous conditions, really squalid conditions.

And then she's moved to an isolated cell by herself in the pitch darkness, which is punctuated only by beatings from the prison guards. She doesn't know how long she's spent there, but then she's set free from her imprisonment.

And she can't take in the cleanness, the beauty, the light, the freedom. There's a long description of her just washing and washing and washing and seeing the layer upon layer of dirt and grime disappear down the drain, putting on clean clothes, simply lying on a bed.

A new woman. reborn, remade. That's what the Holy Spirit has done inside us if we're Christians. Washed all of the moral filth, the spiritual filthiness off of us.

Washed off the hardened layers of jealousy and hatred. Washed the slavery and chains of our heart. Made us new inside. Created in us a clean heart.

[27 : 06] And again, that's not a quick freshen up. Look at verse 6. God poured out the Holy Spirit on us richly. Or the NIV says generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Friends, this is the drenched shower. This is the waterfall of washes. He's not gone cheap on our salvation as if he's worried he'll run out.

He's poured out on us the fullness of an infinite divine person into our lives to cleanse us, fill us, and rebirth us. And to be clear, that's not for special Christians who have done something to get that gift. No, that is the very point at which you put your trust in Jesus Christ. That is when the Holy Spirit makes new your heart and comes to dwell there forever and ever.

And so if you are a Christian tonight and have trusted in Jesus, then you are no longer the person you once were. That person is gone, is dead, crucified, away, washed off.

[28 : 15] You are no longer the slave of verse 3, but the heir of verse 7 to eternal life. Paul says you can build your life on that truth.

It's a trustworthy saying. It's a firm foundation, which means if you've never trusted Jesus to save you in this way, you can take hold of this now.

It is trustworthy. It is deserving of your faith. And tonight, know that freedom and that rebirth within you, the washing off the stains of the past and everything that rules wrongly over you now, to tonight begin a new life with God, the life you were made for.

Let me invite you to do that tonight and be free to love your neighbor as yourself. And if you have done that, and you know that rebirth within you, that washing clean, well then what?

Well if Jesus plus something produces pride, arrogance, superiority, then what does Jesus plus nothing produce? That brings us to our final point, verse eight.

[29 : 28] Jesus plus nothing equals devoted to good works. Have a look, verse eight. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things so that those who believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

These things are excellent and profitable for people. The only difference between you and everyone else is the goodness and grace of God, then there is no person too difficult for you to serve, and no work that is too menial to be left to someone else.

It doesn't show up in the translation, but the word for good in verse one and in verse eight are actually different words in Greek. Verse one is the normal word for kind of good in general, the general word for good.

Verse eight is a word which means something more like beautiful, excellent, valuable. Swim through the glory of the true gospel, and even ordinary good works become stunning, glorious works which are excellent and profitable for all people.

everyone wins. From the prime minister to the homeless woman, when Christians bear the good fruit of our faith in the world. Now we've already been told to be ready for good work, so we're to prepare ourselves for the opportunities that God gives us to do good to others.

[31 : 01] But now notice Paul presses us further. Now we've heard this glorious gospel, we're to be careful to devote ourselves to good works.

Now that is much more kind of trained, isn't it? Specific, deliberate. We're not to be lazy, or even careless about what we do for others.

In a way this requires, doesn't it, the self-control that we were hearing about a couple of weeks ago, when our desires, everything in us says, time for some me time, right?

Done enough for other people. Time for my passions and pleasures. Well our regenerate self, washed clean by the Holy Spirit, says actually no. That is my natural sinful desire.

But God's goodness to me means that I now have a supernatural devotion to take care that I've done the good for others that he wants me to do today.

[32 : 01] Careful to devote ourselves to good works. Now that doesn't mean you can't take time out, time to rest, that's really important. Lots of us have had that over the summer.

I hope you're feeling refreshed. But brothers and sisters, it is to say that if the loving myself bit of love my neighbor as myself is what you take most care over and devote yourself to, you've got the gospel the wrong way up.

God's goodness and love to you should be shown in your goodness and love to your neighbor. So what does that mean as we finish? What does that mean for you? For me, the thought of all people is actually a bit debilitating. Do you find that? Eight billion people on planet earth.

I'm to be careful to devote myself to doing good to all people. Does it mean then that I have to, you know, set up a charity and do a fun run and raise some money or, you know, run for office and become some kind of prime minister or king?

[33 : 12] I don't think it means that. That might be what some of us are called to. Those are good public spirited things for Christians to do. Those are good things for us to do, maybe some of you.

But for most of us, I think it means taking care to do good to the people that God brings into our path. He's not insisting you do good to every one of the eight billion people on earth, all people. I think he is insisting we're to take care to do good to all kinds of people in our lives, all people. The people we work with, our teachers, our class at school, the neighbors next door, the parents at the school gate, the people who work in the coffee shop you go to, the people on the bus with you. The list goes on and on. Every kind of person that crosses your path. Again, call to mind the people that you brush up against in a normal day. Perhaps as you pray at the end of a day or at the beginning of a new day, you can think about the different settings that you'll be in. Maybe pick out a handful of people that you know that you're going to see and consider. How can I do them good today? Perhaps something as simple as getting an extra treat from the shop or staying back to do that dreaded job with them or just asking them how they are, getting to know them.

[34 : 40] That should lead in time to open doors for the gospel. That, of course, is the greatest good we can do for somebody is to tell them this good news. Certainly, it would be a good witness to them of the change that Christ brings into our lives.

But good works in the world is actually just our response to the goodness of God in the gospel, says Paul. It doesn't need to be any more than that.

God has been so undeservedly good to us, so we should take care to do good to the undeserving. If that sounds like hard work, it is.

They're called good works. But that is what you've been saved for, brothers and sisters. The gospel of grace does not give us a free pass for doing good in a world that doesn't know Christ.

Because the fruit of our faith in Christ is excellent and profitable for all people. And so, brothers and sisters, let's share that fruit widely and freely as we go back out into our week and do good to all people.

[35 : 55] Let's pray for that together now. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we are awestruck by your goodness to us that is so undeserved.

Lord, we are sorry that we so scarcely think of the people that we used to be before you found us and saved us. Father, we pray that you would humble us to consider what we would be now still today if not for Christ.

And out of that humility, we pray that we would learn mercy and grace towards others. Help us, Lord. We pray to do good to those whom we struggle with. Father, we want to pray specifically now for that person who we thought of, that person that we find hard in life.

We pray, Lord, that you would grant each of us the grace and humility to do that person good, even to pray for them and to bless them, Lord, when we see them.

Grant us, Lord, to submit to our, the worldly authorities, Lord, that are over us that you've placed here. Lord, we pray for that help, that we would gain a good reputation in this land and that the authorities that are just now would want us to serve, want us to live for you in this city.

[37 : 28] Father, help us, we pray, and equip us as we go from here to love and serve you. For this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.