

## Titus 1:1-4

First, I want to thank you for your prayers regarding discerning what series God wanted me to preach beginning this morning. I believe God revealed that to me this past Tuesday and then confirmed it for me Wednesday night during our congregational prayer time.

Last Sunday I finished preaching through the letter of James in which James stresses the importance of our faith not being merely something we claim to have but that real faith shows up in the ways that we live our lives. Faith doesn't just show up on Sunday when you're dressed up and sitting in a pew in church but faith is very practical and makes a significant difference in all areas of our lives and people ought to be able to recognize our faith through our actions. Once again, James is not saying that it's our actions that save us, we're saved by God's grace and we accept that through faith in Jesus Christ. But you ought to be able to look at your life and see evidence of this saving faith.

What we're going to launch into this morning and spend time in for the next 7 weeks is another New Testament letter which stresses the importance of a living breathing faith being lived out in the midst of very immoral culture. This letter, while it was written about 2,000 years ago, could have easily been written to any church in our American culture today. I think you'll easily see the parallels from the churches this letter was sent to and read in to our church and culture today. And similar to James, this letter stresses the importance of living out our faith with actions but this faith is not lived to earn God's favor but rather out of a deep appreciation for what God has already done for us through Jesus Christ. Contained within this letter are two of the greatest passages about motivating grace found anywhere in the Bible.

This letter is quite small – only 3 chapters and a mere 46 verses but there's a lot packed into those 46 verses. And I'm excited to share the truths found in this little letter with you over the next 7 weeks.

This little power packed letter is entitled **Titus**.

This book has not always been treasured among Christians. Perhaps because it's so brief and maybe viewed as not very practical or helpful.

However, you might remember that **Martin Luther** didn't have a very high opinion of the book of James but regarding Titus he wrote: *"This is a short epistle, but a model of Christian doctrine, in which is comprehended in a masterful way all that is necessary for a Christian to know and to live."* Pretty high praise.

### Quick facts about Titus:

- Titus, oddly, is never mentioned in the book of Acts.
- Titus is mentioned 13 times in the writings of Paul.
- Titus was apparently a convert of Paul (**Titus 1:4** he calls him *"my true son in our common faith."*)
- Titus was a Gentile Greek and Paul took him to the Jerusalem council with him (Galatians 2:1-3).
- Titus was apparently Paul's fix-it man (Paul sent him to Corinth to fix problems in the church there and left him in Crete with the difficult job of setting up structure within the churches there.).
- Apparently Paul and Titus went to Crete after his release from Roman imprisonment (after the end of Acts) and began setting up churches there.
- The last reference we read about Titus is that he was sent on a mission to Dalmatia (2 Timothy 4:10) which is modern day Yugoslavia.

Let's talk about this island of Crete for a moment.

### **The Island of Crete:**

- Crete is located in the Mediterranean Sea and is about 156 miles long and 30 miles wide (which would be approximately from here to Duluth and 30 miles wide).
- On the day of Pentecost, when Peter preached his powerful sermon, there were individuals from Crete there (Acts 2:11). So there may have been Cretans there who heard the gospel message, accepted Jesus and went back to Crete proclaiming this good news.
- Cretans were notoriously immoral in their conduct.

**Polybius**, the ancient historian, wrote that it was almost “*impossible to find...personal conduct more treacherous or a public policy more unjust than in Crete.*” He also added “*So much in fact do sordid love of gain and lust for wealth prevail among them, that the Cretans are the only people in the world in whose eyes no gain is disgraceful.*”

**Marcus Cicero** was a Roman philosopher, politician, lawyer, orator, and historian and he wrote: “*Indeed, men’s principles of life are so different that the Cretans...consider piracy and brigandage honorable.*” Brigandage is a group of bandits who lived in the forests or mountains and robbed people.

In fact in this letter to Titus, Paul even quotes one of the Cretans most respected poets, **Epimenides**, in his assessment of his own people. “*Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.*” (Titus 1:12) and Paul says that from his experience, Epimenides is right on in his assessment.

So, it’s into that culture that Paul leaves Titus to try to set up structure within the various churches that have been established there. Titus has a tall task in order for him, but apparently Paul believes that Titus is just the man for the job.

### **Titus job: (1:5)**

1. To straighten up what was left unfinished
2. To appoint elders in every church.

Let’s read together Paul’s opening remarks in this letter.

**Read Titus 1:1-4** If you’d like to follow along and become familiar with where Titus is in your Bible, turn toward the back of your Bible and find the book of Hebrews. Titus is just a couple of pages in front of Hebrews.

Notice that Paul chooses two terms to describe himself.

### **Paul’s identity:**

1. **He’s a servant of God.** Only time he describes himself as a servant of God. There are two types of servants. The most common type would be those servants who served someone for a limited period of time. They were temporary slaves. According to God’s regulations laid out in the Old Testament, slaves were only allowed to be a slave temporarily and then they were to be set free. Freedom might occur when they’ve paid off a debt or at the end of a seven year Sabbath cycle or it might be in the Jubilee year.

But there was also a provision for a slave who permanently committed himself to his master. He was called a bond-servant. By his own choice this servant could say to his master, “I want to serve you always.” And this is the type of slave that Paul chooses to describe himself as to God. He’s chosen to voluntarily serve God for the remainder of his life. And every Christian is called to make that same choice. Christians aren’t allowed to just serve God when it’s convenient or helpful for the advancement of a career or to make new friends or find a mate. To be a follower of Jesus Christ meant that you choose to serve God forever. But God is worthy to be served.

## **2. Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ.**

When Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, as he was on his way to arrest Christians for their faith, Jesus called him to be his witness to the Gentiles in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ's offer of salvation. It's his life's mission from that point forward.

Next Paul explains specifically what he's called to do which impacts each of us.

### **Paul's mission and our identity:**

1. **The faith of God's elect** (this is belief in Jesus Christ but it's more than that. It's a commitment to following Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior).
2. **The knowledge of the truth** (this is much more than merely knowing something to be true. It means to know something thoroughly and to acknowledge what you know. In other words this knowledge affects how you live your life in profound ways). Which leads to the third aspect – godliness.
3. **That leads to godliness** (the commitment to follow Jesus and the ever increasing personal knowledge of Jesus Christ should result in godliness. A lifestyle that looks increasingly more and more like Jesus – which is exactly what James talked about). But it goes deeper than that. “*Godliness*” at it's core meaning meant to literally tremble. It's the sense of proper response to understanding the nature of God and living in constant awe of Him.
4. **Resting on the hope of eternal life** (our faith and knowledge have as their foundation the rock solid element of hope. Hope that one day we will go and live with God forever and ever. But it's also hope for the present as well. As we live in daily dependence upon Him and learn to trust him more and more we believe that God is for us and with us in every and all circumstances. And because of that we know that nothing can separate us from His love for us. And that He will work out everything for our good and His greatest glory in and through our lives.

Jesus, when he was with his disciples in those final hours before the cross said: “*Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*” (John 17:3). It's this eternal life, this deep and abiding love in God and His absolute love and goodness and faithfulness that carries us through life's storms and heartaches as well as helps us to stand firm and unwavering in our commitment to Him – even in the midst of a cultural that is immoral and ungodly, like in Crete and in America today.

## Sermon Notes – 9/17/2017

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- 2 The \_\_\_\_\_ of the truth
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