

Titus 2:11-15 sermon

My preaching text this morning is one of the two passages that I encouraged you to consider memorizing and that are on the laminated cards that are still available in the back of the room. And so as we begin I'd like to encourage you to stand and read, in unison, this powerful passage.

Read Titus 2:11-15 together You may be seated

This power packed passage begins with the word "**For**". Paul often uses this word as the reason for what he's just said. For instance in Philippians 2:12-13 where he begins with "*continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling*", and then adds the reason to do that with "*for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*" And as I've shared the past couple of weeks, what precedes this is Paul's instructions to Titus on how to respond to the false teachers who have crept into the churches on this island of Crete. Paul notes that their false teachings have led many to believe false teachings about Jesus and how they should live their lives. And apparently those believing and following these false teachers are not only believing lies but are also living lifestyles that are not consistent with what it looks like to be a follower of Christ.

And so, in response to that Paul launches detailed description of what it should look like to live a Christian lifestyle. And in this section, Paul specifically addresses 5 groups of people: older men mentoring younger men, older women mentoring younger women and slaves (or for us "employees"). He wraps that portion of his letter with these words: "*so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.*" We don't live a transformed life in order to try to earn spiritual brownie points so that we'll have a better chance of going to heaven after we die. It's important to live a Christian life so that the message about Jesus become attractive to nonbelievers. So that as they look at our life they see something their lives are lacking and it creates a hungering and thirsting for what we have or at minimal a curiosity as to what makes us live so unlike everyone else in this world.

- Why do we love when others hate?
- Why do we give generously when others hoard their possessions?
- Why do we forgive freely when others hold on to grudges and seek to get even?
- Why do we see the good in others when others point out other's faults?
- Why are we willing to listen to others when most are way too busy with their own lives?

Living a radically different Christian lifestyle ought to cause others to sit up and take notice in a really good way and hopefully ask questions which then allows us to tell them about Jesus. And that really good message is about what Paul is about to share with us.

And so he says, "**For**". What's about to follow is the reason why we ought to live a transformed life, a Christ-like life. Paul's first sentence sets Christianity apart from all other religions in the world.

"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people."

You may be thinking, how does that simple little sentence set apart Christianity from all other religions? That's because, as a Christian, most of us have become way too familiar and comfortable with the concept of God's "*grace*".

C.S. Lewis once came upon a spirited discussion at a conference as the distinctiveness of Christianity. Some were arguing it's the incarnation of Jesus, others were arguing that it's the distinct teachings of Christ, and still others were arguing that it was Christ's resurrection. C.S. Lewis simply said: "*Oh that's easy, it's grace.*" And as usual, C. S. Lewis was exactly right.

Judaism: If you heard that with Jewish ears, it wouldn't make sense because the belief is that we can be reconciled to God through acts of repentance, good deeds and a life of devotion.

Buddhism: believes that you reach heaven or achieve Nirvana by following the **Eightfold Path** which includes acting, speaking and living in the right manner with the right intentions.

Hinduism: salvation is reached when the worshiper is freed from the cycle of reincarnation and his spirit becomes one with god. This freedom from the cycle of reincarnation is achieved through selfless devotion to and service of a particular god, through understanding the nature of the universe or by mastering the actions needed to fully appease the many gods.

Islam: Muslims believe that salvation comes to those who obey Allah sufficiently that their good deeds outweigh the bad ones. They emphasize regular daily prayers, going on pilgrimages to Meca, and performing good works in the hope of tipping the scales of justice in their favor. There's always a great deal of uncertainty over whether you've done enough. Or you can be a martyr in service to Allah which guarantees to send the worshiper to paradise.

All other religions teach that it's man's attempt to achieve unity with God through our efforts that assures us salvation. Christianity flips that belief on it's head and teaches that God came down to us in order to help us get back to Him. And in doing that Jesus willingly and lovingly gave up his life for our sins, thereby offering us a gift we don't deserve but that God freely offers to everyone. That's called "*grace*".

Paul writes that the "*grace of God has appeared*". The word "*appeared*" is the Greek word "*epiphany*", which means to suddenly appear. It's used now if someone has a light bulb moment and suddenly understands something. But in the Bible an epiphany was used in the Old Testament to describe the appearance of God and in the New Testament it's used to describe the appearance of Jesus. Paul uses it later in Titus chapter 3 when he says, **Titus 3:4 (NIV)** *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.*"

So when Paul here says that the grace of God appeared, everyone would know that he's referring to a specific appearance in a specific person by the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus' appearance wasn't just a thought or an idea but it actually happened in space and time. And when he appeared he offered salvation to all people. He offered the privilege of coming into a right relationship with God. Not because we earned it but because Christ paid the penalty for our sins through his crucifixion and resurrection.

This is the greatest offer anyone has ever made in history. **Christ died so that we might live. Live the kind of life God originally created us to live.** We're offered the privilege of being reunited with God because of what Christ did.

Everyone then has to decide what they are going to do with that offer because nowhere in the Bible does it say that everyone will go to heaven. Instead, John makes it pretty clear and simple in the opening words to his Gospel.

John 1:11-12 (NIV) *Jesus came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*

So, let me ask you – how do you properly respond when someone gives you something you don't deserve but they just want to bless your life? How would you feel if you were on death row and somebody stepped forward and offered to take your place so that you could go free? That's what Jesus did for each of us. We were destined to be separated from God for all of eternity until Jesus came and died in your place. That ought to fill our hearts with love and joy and gratitude. It ought to create a longing inside of us to live our lives in such a way that Jesus is pleased.

And that's exactly Paul's point with his next sentence.

Titus 2:12-13 (NIV) *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,*

What exactly is the "*It*" that Paul refers to in the first word of this passage? The "*It*" refers back to God's grace. Grace is serving a dual role here.

1. In verse 11 it's God's grace that saves us. I've often heard grace defined as "**unmerited favor**" meaning it's extended from God to us, who don't deserve it. It's the powerful sense of a judge in a courtroom who is overseeing your case in which you're clearly guilty. But after all the evidence has been presented against you he slams his gavel down on his desk and declares you guilty. But then he steps down from the bench, takes off his legal robe and says that he will pay the penalty he just assessed to you. That's grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 captures this concept of grace beautifully. *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."*
2. But then there's a second meaning behind grace and that is that it's the empowerment of God to live the kind of life He calls us to live. When we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, He places his spirit within each of us to empower us to live our lives as children of God our Father. From the inside out God begins to change our minds and hearts to become more like Jesus. Not only does God do the very painful work of saving us from our sins but He also empowers us to live a transformed life by His power and energy working with our own efforts.

We see this inner transforming grace of God at work in the early apostles as the church was getting going.

Acts 4:33 (NIV) *With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And **God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all***

Paul testifies to the transforming and enabling power of God's grace in his life.

2 Corinthians 1:12 (NIV) *Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom **but on God's grace.***

The apostle Peter encourages every Christian to continue to grow in this empowering grace.

2 Peter 3:18 (NIV) *But **grow in the grace** and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

And earlier in this same letter, Peter says the same thing that Paul is saying here: that God has divinely equipped everyone of us to live a victorious life as a child of God.

2 Peter 1:3-5 (NIV) *His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

Notice that God gives us everything we need to live a transformed as a child of God. And with that understanding he then adds

2 Peter 1:5-9 (NIV) *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

You see the way this works is that God gives us His Holy Spirit and thus the empowering grace to live our lives differently once we accept Jesus Christ. But this happens as we work with God towards this transformation. As we walk life in step with the Holy Spirit by abiding in Christ. Every day drawing as close as we possibly can to Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, We turn away from our old self-defeating lifestyles and begin to live our lives in order to please God. We begin to live the life in conjunction with God's power and leading.

I hope you're catching how powerful and radical this Christian life is. Rather than requiring us to try to earn our way to God, God comes down to us and pays the price for us to come to Him. And then He equips us to begin to live a transformed and empowered life of love and gratitude.

Paul summarized this new life with these brief words: *"We make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it."* (2 Corinthians 5:9)

But Paul's not finished yet describing this amazing life of a Christ follower. He says that God redeemed us by His grace and empowers us to live a victorious life through His abiding grace and we live this life with great hope.

Titus 2:12-13 (NIV) *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,*

As Christians we know that all of history and our lives are heading toward a glorious finish. We cross the goal line when Jesus comes back (the word epiphany again) and takes us home to be with Him where we will enjoy His presence and peace and protection in heaven. We've been praying for awhile now for a friend of Val Ebeling's by the name of Chown. Her body has been viciously attacked by cancer and she appears to be heading into the last days of life here on earth. But Chown doesn't have to fear death because she's a follower of Jesus Christ. She can face death with confidence that she knows exactly where she is going and when she takes her last breath here on earth her next breath will be inhaled with the clean fresh air in heaven, where she will never have to experience the pain and suffering of cancer, or any other disease forever and ever.

Did you catch through this the three historical aspects of God's grace.

1. **Past grace** – Christ died on the cross for your sins and offers you the gift of salvation.
2. **Present grace** – God empowers us to live a transformed life
3. **Future grace** – God instills us with hope that He's preparing a wonderful place where we will be privileged to live as His children with Him forever.

I love how Paul wraps up his thoughts to this section:

Titus 2:14-15 (NIV) *...who (Jesus) gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

Jesus "redeemed" us from our former life. This word "*redeemed*" was most often used in the buying and selling of slaves. Slaves would be brought out for the potential buyers to look over and decide if they wanted to bid on them or not based on how healthy and strong they were. But one of the amazing aspects of God is that He didn't just die for the good looking or healthy or strong. He willingly and lovingly came and died for everyone, even those who wanted nothing to do with Him. He even came to die for those who nailed Jesus to a cross to die. Those of you who were here last week might remember that we were the **adikomos** (the rejects). But God wants us. And so He came and gave His life up to take us out of our sin and the darkness in which we were living, to purify us (to wash our sins away through His blood) and to adopt us into His very own family and create us as a people who are "*eager*" (or the word is **zealous**) to do what is good.

This is the same word that Paul used to describe his life before he came to know Christ. He says that he was "extremely zealous in learning and following the teachings of the Old Testament." **Galatians 1:14-15** But once Paul became a follower of Jesus Christ, this extreme zeal was transferred from the teachings of the Old Testament to the person of Jesus Christ and living his all of his life for Him.

You can hear that zeal in his words in **Philippians 3:7** "*But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*"

Often nonChristians have this perception of the Christian life as being restricted and boring. Paul certainly never considered it that way. Living the Christian life was the passion of His life and it ought to be of our lives as well. C.S. Lewis was right. The grace of God offered to each of us ought to change everything. It ought to give us an incredible sense of relief and gratitude that we're no longer separated from God, both now and for eternity, but instead we've been invited into and made a part of God's family, along with His Son, Jesus Christ. When God looks at you, He sees you as a much loved child of His. If you've ever felt like you didn't belong, you don't have to any longer because God has invited you and welcomed you in to His family. And it gives Him great pleasure to have you as part of His family. I wish I could have lived in the first century and seen Jesus' face when he told the story of the prodigal son. And how there was great rejoicing when the son finally came home. When I close my eyes and

picture Him telling that story I picture His eyes light up because that's what happens every time a person comes back into a right relationship with their Heavenly Father and is welcomed into the family.

We offer an opportunity for you to make that step of faith and acceptance and say to God, "Thank you for making it possible for me to have my sins paid for on the cross and I want to come home and begin to live my life for you." If that's your desire this morning I invite you to come forward as we stand and sing our Hymn of Invitation.