

The Great Transaction
Titus 3:3-7

Romans 10:1-13

Romans 10:14-11:5

Responsive Psalm 138

This morning we are going to pick up where we left off in Titus chapter 3. Last week we focused upon the first exhortation we see here from Paul, which was to remind the church to be subject to rulers and authorities, with the mindset of the gospel message being the goal. As humans we need constant reminders of the realities of Christ, and our relationship with him. We are so easily distracted by this life that sometimes we can put these things that really matter on the back burner. But if we are to take Paul's life as an example, he did all things for the sake of the gospel. And here in the passages that we are looking at this morning we can see his own recognition of that shift in his own life, brought about by the new birth in Christ. No longer pushing for righteousness, but living as one who is righteous because of what Christ has done.

Let us go ahead and start out this morning by reading our passage, we will start at verse 1, and read to 8. So, I guess to start here a few things should be mentioned. As I was looking at some various resources on this passage this week it would appear that they did not all agree on who this "we" is that is in verse 3. Some said it was the Cretans themselves, others said it was Christianity as a whole in which Paul was including himself, others said it was Paul referring to himself, and likely Titus. In each of those ways of looking at what is being said here does not change the realities of what Paul is writing, for the message is the same no matter who it is referring to. But I think what makes the most sense here is what I alluded to last week, that this is Paul talking about himself, his experience, and in the way it is worded is equating Titus as well in his own experience.

The reason why I say that, is the flow of context here and it is the answer that I think makes the most sense. In verse 1 he says, "remind them" clearly speaking of the Cretan church and the people which Titus was to minister to. Part of what Titus was being sent there to do, was to remind these people who tend to rebel against the governing authorities that our fight is not against king and earthly powers, but against Satan and spiritual powers. But here we see Paul says, "for we ourselves" I think in the context we can quickly rule out the idea that he is talking about the Cretan church here, but rather more personally about himself and reminding Titus where he came from as well. Also what helps to determine this, is remembering that this was a letter written to Titus, not to the church. Paul is addressing Titus directly, not the church. It can be a helpful reminder to reflect upon where we came from, who we were before Christ. Because the people that we are to share this gospel message to are without Christ, and in remembering where we came from ourselves it should draw out compassion and patience in our ministry. For we were no better, and would be no better except by the grace of God.

So while I think that this is directed to Titus, and it is Paul recalling his own experience, we to can put ourselves in that place, any Christian should be able recognize that change within our lives and we can read this as directed toward ourselves even, before Christ "we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. This is a description of the human experience, of the human heart and desires without Christ. At the core is foolishness and disobedience, each go hand in hand. Rejecting the message of the gospel is foolishness for it leads to death, and in man's natural state of disobedience against their own

creator is abject disobedience, as we seek after self, seek after sin, believing ourselves to be the most important person in our story.

All the while whether a believer or not, it is God who is the ultimate person in the story of mankind, whether to save, or to judge. In the end we will all stand before him and at that point all that will matter is what he says. Our decisions, our actions, our lives of which we believed we were in control of will be meaningless in that moment, the autonomy that we believed we had as humans will be wiped aside and we will see the deception of sin for what it truly is, and the foolishness of our disobedient unbelief. Mankind in their sin is blind to their own foolishness, Satan has the world in a blind stupor deceiving the world that meaning and purpose lies in anything other than Christ. So we pursue those empty experiences, chasing after the things that we think are important all the while being consumed by self and not seeing God's revelation. As scripture says, even nature cries out, in mankind's foolishness they look for any reason other than God for the existence of this world, suppressing the truth of its creation because if there is a creator, then we are created by him, subject to him.

The precise amount of gravity, the exact mixture of oxygen we need to breath, if any of these so called "natural" things were to shift to far one way or another, this planet could not sustain life. It is a perfect design, made for sustaining the life that God has made. These laws of nature that maintain this perfect balance, testify to a creator, testify to purpose and meaning, but in our sinfulness we are foolish and deceived and do not see it. That is why we need the gospel, that is why we need the ministry of the holy spirit working in the hearts and minds of people, that is why salvation is a work of God, awakening people from their foolish stupor, to be able to see God. As Paul writes in verse 4 "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared." God's revelation to us is his Son, it is Christ on the cross, the ultimate symbol of his kindness and love toward us, that Christ would die so that we may live. Until this kindness, until this love we were stuck in a cycle of sin and despair and false belief. Through Christ we have been freed from the slavery of that sin, awoken to the realities of God because he has caused us to see him.

Everything changes when we come to Christ, our minds, our focus, our purpose, turn from self and instead turn to God, as we share in the kindness, and love of the Father. There is nothing like the gift that has been given us, and there is nothing more merciful than the grace we have been given, to find forgiveness in that gift, to be free from sin, to no longer be a slave to guilt and sin, no longer lost in the emptiness of life, but to have our purpose, and our fulfillment in Christ. This salvation we have been given was God's plan all along, the entire old testament tells of a savior, tells of a sacrifice, tells of one who would reconcile God's people to himself, and set us apart for his purpose and his glory.

God expressed his kindness, his mercy, and his love toward us by sending his only begotten Son to save the world by the Cross. God could have chosen to judge humanity, he could have wiped the earth and started over, but he loved us, he loved his creation so he gave us a way to be redeemed, he chose to put his judgment of his people on Christ. He freely gave us salvation in Christ, this is an unmerited, undeserved gift given merely by his grace and his mercy toward us. As Paul writes in verse 5 "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." This verse shows this massive shift in salvation, the basis of our salvation rests on God's mercy in sending his Son. This goes against the entirety of the human system and experience.

This past weekend we were talking with Casey about this, how the human system is a merit based system, we all operate on a basic rule of expectation. By that, I mean doing good, gets us good. Everything is transactional, which is why we get the saying, treat others as you want to be treated. But God broke through that, and needed to, because if that was a reality in our relationship with him, that transaction would be everlasting death, for we can not gain enough merit to cover our own sin

God breaks through that human system, and shows pure mercy, and pure grace, to the undeserved. Jesus teaches us to break away from this system, written in the book of Matthew, he says, (chapter 5:38-45) You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you not to resist an evil person, but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy but I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully you and persecute you. That you maybe sons of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust.”

God does not operate in the same transactional merit based system that mankind does, he has broken through and he calls his children to be like him. This is sort of a silly example, but I see this sort of thing play out every day at work, about half of my team that I work with will help one another, while the other half would barely lift a finger when asked. Those who are helpful, it didn't take long until they stopped helping certain members of the team because there was no reciprocation, they would help, but when needed help would get none. So, now they only help one another and leave the other half to figure it out for themselves. It is all transactional, but in God's economy he says, help, it doesn't matter if they return the favor, it doesn't matter if they don't recognize or appreciate it, you do it anyway because your Father has given all to you, and we are to live as examples of that gift, we who have been given all should give all of ourselves for his glory.

It seems like such a little thing, but living a life for Christ, breaking away from the humanistic transactional merit system is one way we stand out to the world, we become an enigma as we seek to reflect Christ in our own lives. In Peter's letter to the Jewish believers who were undergoing persecution he writes to the believing wives and says, (1 Peter 3:1-4) “Wives, likewise be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward-arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel- rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.”

This isn't just true for wives with an unbelieving husband, but is true to all of us in our dealings and reactions to the world. In verse 1 Paul told Titus “remind them to be subject to the rulers and authorities, to obey and be ready for any good work.” It is the same principle at work here, live as believers, live as those who have been given such grace, so that our lives reflect that reality to the world around us no matter our situation, so that others may see him through us. Our conduct may not create righteousness in us, but our conduct should be righteous because of what is in us. God works in us and through us to be just and holy, and he has given us the Holy Spirit as a teacher, as a guide to instructs and convicts. Scripture is not discerned merely through human knowledge, but through the

holy spirit which opens our eyes and ears to the things of God. Without which we could neither see, nor hear the truth.

There are 2 main things that drive a righteous living for God's people. First, is simply in response to the love that God has shown us, a recognition of his mercy and grace, that while we were yet sinners, as scripture says, while we were enemies, Christ died for us. We owe all, to he who has given us all, and we strive to live as those who are worthy of that calling.

The second reason for righteous living within God's people is that our lives are a reflection of our belief. We are to live out externally, the inward reality of Christ that is working in us. Verse 7 "having been justified by his grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." We are the adopted sons and daughters of the most high, he has paid the price, and made us his children, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. This was something that God did on his own for us, purely out of his own mercy for us. For by Adam all are born in sin, but in the New Adam, Christ..all are made alive. We have been born again, we are a new creation who is now able to see God, to hear him, and to follow him. Lets just read again what Paul says here, in verse 4-7, and just think upon the beauty of this reality, of our life in Christ, we who were afar off, rebellions, envious, full of lust and pride, have been made to sit at the feet of God in praise and worship of his holy name. Verse 4 "But when the kindness and the love of God our savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the holy spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our savior, that having been justified by this grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

For a believer this is a beautiful reality, for the believer this is our hope, that we will one day be united with God because he has shown us this mercy. Not because we are good people and it is owed, but simply out of his love for us that he gave us such mercy that we should know him. Our standing before God is now as son's and daughters, inheritors of the kingdom. In Christ we rule and reign, we are not victims, we are not slaves but through Christ we are conquerors, we can overcome the sin that so easily ensnares us, and we can conquer death through everlasting life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Christianity is not a weakness or a crutch, but it is strength and power through the creator, because it is he who cares for us, it is he who keeps us, and he who provides. As believers we have been given the spirit who convicts and instructs, who gives discernment and wisdom in the handling of God's word so that we may order our life around God. It is all God working in us through the spirit, keeping us, encouraging us, instructing us, and convicting us so that we live as believers in this dying world.

It is all God, he provided the means, and he provides the method, and provides the outcome as he works in us to will and to do according to his good pleasure. Some would call that slavery, saying we have no autonomy, that our wills have been taken over. But the opposite is actually true, we have been freed from slavery, no loner enslaved by the lusts of the flesh and the sin that so easily controlled us before, we are now truly free having seen the light of God are now able to choose the things of God and we do so out of a love for him. Once we have been born again, and see God for who he is, and see ourselves for who we truly are, how can we not chose the greatest gift given to us, over the dung heap that is our sin? It is true freedom to be able to follow Christ, freedom from the bondage of this world, from the bondage of this body, looking to the everlasting and glorious hope in him.

Christ is our driving force, he is our reason, our purpose, and our life. Therefore we strive to live in a manner pleasing to him, expressing our love for him through our conduct, as we seek to live like him in a ministry to the lost and dying. Titus was to be this example to the people of Crete, and we are to be this example to the people in our own community. Paul talks a lot about christian conduct in his writings, but it is never to gain, but it is because of the gift we have been given in Christ, and we love the father who first loved us. Our relationship with God is not a two way transaction, we don't gain because of our good or merit, we gain because he showed mercy, we brought nothing except sin and rebellion, and he broke through to us in the new birth causing us to see him, to know him, and to follow him.