

The Work Of The Gospel

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Bible Text: Titus 3:3-8

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Titus chapter 3 verses 3 through 8. I will be reading it and preaching it from the Modern English Version. Let us focus our hearts on what God is saying to us today. "We also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various desires and pleasures, living in evil and envy, filled with hatred and hating each other. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, being justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you constantly to affirm, so that those who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to everyone." The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

Brothers and sisters, I have to tell you that I needed this text today. Titus, as little as it is, has been a heavy book to work through. It confronts all of us where we are. It tweaks our nose, it pulls our ear, it kicks us in the shin, it reminds us of what we are to be doing as leaders, as followers, as Christ's church in each of the stations and places that Christ has put us. And as we get to this section we're reminded again of the glorious beauty of the gospel at work in the lives of sinners like me and like you. And what's even better is that we're pointed to the fruitfulness of it. We're pointed to the fact that we, not only as a pastor and elders, but all of us are to constantly affirm these things. We are to be talking about these things. Brothers and sisters, I want to encourage you today to talk constantly of who you were, how the Lord changed that, and who you are today. All of those things. Be reminded from whence you have come; the transition that the Lord brought your life; where you are today, which includes where you're going tomorrow. Speak of these things. Remind yourself of these things. Remind one another of these things. There is a lot of redemptive theology crammed into this little paragraph and I want to try to unpack it for you in a simple way. And hopefully it's a blessing to you, as it has been to me as I've studied and meditated on it.

Firstly, we see redemption promised, accomplished, and applied in this text. We see redemption. This little phrase in the second verse of this section: [Titus 3:4] "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared." In the verse previous to this, Paul is describing some pretty nasty stuff. This foolishness, disobedience, deception, desires and pleasures, evil and envy, hating and being hated. And then verse 4 begins with that "but when the kindness and love of God." That stands in complete opposition to everything that had been said in verse 3. It's a dark, dark room and the Lord switches the light on. It's a room of great discomfort and pain and anguish. And here comes the Holy Spirit with peace and kindness and mercy and healing. What this begins to describe for us is what we

call "effectual calling," that work of God's Spirit where He convinces us of our sin and misery. Brothers and sisters, I think this gets to the heart of what the Spirit was calling the Israelites to on the day of atonement because there's that grand sense in which we say, "yeah, I know I'm a sinner. That's why Jesus had to come die. But He died! And He was buried and He rose again, He ascended and He saved me. Why do I need to dwell on that? Why do I need to worry about that?" You don't need to worry about it, you don't need to dwell on it in an obsessive way, but brothers and sisters, let us not lose our-our convinced-ness of the sin and misery that we have apart from Christ. Don't start believing your own press that you're alright, you're- you're a good person, you do nice things, you got all your ducks lined up. That is Christ working in us, that is not us. And the Spirit comes and the beginning of redemption for us, experientially, is this effectual calling where the Spirit takes that call on the outer fleshy ear and He drags it down through all of our realities and perceptions and schemas and He crams it into our heart and the light comes on.

It's like those moments in those Febreeze commercials where they have the lights off and the people are sitting in absolute nastiness but they've sprayed Febreeze so it smells nice and they're like, "Where are you?" "Well, it smells like I'm in a laundry room with fresh laundry," and they turn it on and they're sitting in a dumpster. That's us. That's us when the effectual call happens. We go from thinking, "You know, this isn't bad. It smells nice. Look at all these nice things," and then the light comes on and we realize that we are sitting in filth and muck and mire and the more we, in our own-- on our own try to get away from it, realize it's not outside of me, it's inside of me, it's coming out. It's what the effectual call does. Convinces us of our sin and misery, it enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and it renews our wills so that we want to do something about it. He persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the Gospel. Second Timothy 1 [vs 9] we're reminded He "who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not by our works, but by His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." Second Thessalonians 2 [vs 13-14], "But we are bound to always give thanks to God for you, beloved brothers of the Lord, because God has from the beginning called you to salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief of the truth. To this He called you by our gospel, to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." And in here in Titus 3 verses 3 through 8 we have unfolded for us, it's like this little tiny package that when we open it becomes this large beautiful gift reminding us of the fullness of the gospel, that all that Christ has done for us and in all the particularities of life and ministry and relationships and confrontation and subjection, all of these things that Paul has touched on thus far in Titus. What is to be the resounding chorus of that life and ministry? It's to be the sweet grandeur of the gospel because everything prior to this doesn't matter if verses 3 through 8 don't stand intact in our lives and in our ministries and in our homes and in our church. We see redemption promised, accomplished, and applied.

Secondly, (and this is where we see the process begin to unfold) we see sin. This is what we see in verse 3. We see our sin. What is sin? We know that it's [WSC 14] "... any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." Kids, it's anything that you do, think, or say that displeases God. That's what sin is. And is not just sin that we were. Sin and misery. Shorter catechism [Q 18] asks about the sinfulness of that estate whereinto we fell and it reminds us it "...consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it." We are born sinners and we do nothing but prove it by everything that we do. Are we sinners because we sin or do we sin because we're sinners? The answer is yes. It becomes a compound problem in our lives. Romans 5 [vs 12], "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death has spread to all men, because all have sinned." [vs 19] "For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One the many will be made righteous." Or Ephesians 2 [vs 1-3], "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the

age of this world and according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among them we all also once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and we were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." Those verses describe-- go together, correlate quite nicely with verse 3 of Titus 3. And how does it describe us? It describes us as dead. Dead in our trespasses and sins. James 1 reminds us that it's a cyclical problem when lust has conceived it brings forth sin and when sin is finished it brings forth death. Those- those of you who have ever fielded the question when you walk in a room and your wife is pregnant and they might see the other little ones coming in behind you and what do people say? "Don't you know what causes that?" 'cause things happen and conception happens and then children happen. The same question comes in our sinfulness, brothers and sisters. We are pregnant with sin. Don't we know what causes that? When our lust conceives and it's leading us to death. You think your children are gonna be the death of you? Your sin is going to be the death of you. This is our state before Christ. This is the heaviness and weightiness of it.

Matthew 15, the Lord again reminds us of- of the heart. This false dichotomy of the, you know, Old Testament God with the bad hair days, mad at everybody, just striking people dead left and right. But then Jesus came along, like Jesus is some hippie, you know, tiptoeing through the tulips and- and just is happy all the time. What- what does Jesus do? What is Jesus doing in the gospels? You've heard it said, right? [from Matt 5:27] You've heard it said, don't commit adultery. I tell you, if you look at someone with sexual intent you've committed adultery already. That's not nice. That's not kind. That's not kind to take some blatant outward act that you can prove or disprove that you've done. [from Matt 5:21-22] You've heard it said, don't murder. I tell you don't be needlessly angry with your brother or you've already murdered them in your heart. That's not nice. I can prove if I've murdered someone or not. Jesus, don't drag it into my heart. Don't make it something that I am wrestling with constantly because I can't overcome that. "For out of the heart," it says in Matthew 15 [vs 19], "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immorality, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies." Remember Titus applied that-- Paul in Titus applies that word "blaspheming" not only to God but to other people, as well. Brothers and sisters, before Christ, before the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, this is who we are. We are sinners. Not only are we sinners, we're miserable sinners. The misery [WSC Q19]: "All mankind, by their fall, lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever." Brothers and sisters, apart from Christ not only are we separated from God, not only are we under His wrath and curse, we deserve every day to be the worst possible day we could ever have, we deserve a death that is the worst death we could ever die, and then after that we deserve hell. The sin and misery that comes upon us in the fall of Adam is horrendous and we see it from the beginning. Genesis 3 [vs 8], "Then they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." And what's his response? [vs 10] "I heard Your voice in the garden and was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself." See, for us that makes sense. For us that's not quite as painful to read and to think about because it's all we've known. Not one of us got up this morning and thought, "You know what, I don't need to wear anything to church." If you did, thank you for having a second thought. But see, it's all we've known, isn't it? Shame, hiding, covering, that's all we've known. We are unable to even fully imagine in a way that is realistic at all, living in a world that is all love and all light and all fellowship and all peace with God and with one another. We can't even grasp those concepts. Even in the most glorious, sincere, tender, intimate moments of your marriage or a friendship with another person or with your children it is still tainted by sin. It is still marked by shame. It is still marked by hiding and covering.

The misery is great and yet Lamentations remind us we have no room to complain because we're simply living in the fruits of our sin. Romans 6 [vs 23a], "For the wages of sin is death..." Matthew 25 we're reminded that those who were cursed will be cut off, thrown into the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. But can you imagine what it was like for Adam and Eve as they moved through these moments? Verse 3 of Titus 3 becomes almost a timeline rather than a mere description of our state prior to conversion. As Adam and Eve began to indulge in that foolishness of listening to the serpent and believing, interacting. Maybe they didn't believe at first, maybe they just thought, "well that's an interesting theory. Maybe we could think about that for a minute. What if-- well, let's pretend it could be true, what would that look like?" And then they disobeyed and then were deceived and they were serving their desires and pleasures and they were living in evil and envy and eventually they were filled with hatred and hating each other. See, we as spouses know what it is to fight from day one. You probably fought about something about your wedding or about the engagement or about who to tell first or whatever. It's all we really know. Can you imagine what it was for Adam as the words came out of his mouth. "It's this woman you gave me." Perhaps there was that tinge of "what have we become?" See, even when two spouses are on the verge of disintegration and they're yelling things, "I hate you. I wish I would have never married you. I wish you weren't my spouse." See, they didn't even start at a place of perfection like Adam and Eve did. They still started in sinfulness and brokenness and fallenness. But in this moment, for Adam and Eve, the foolishness had turned to hatred. Brothers and sisters, that is us. That is our misery before our conversion. Sin.

Thirdly, though, okay the word at the bottom, we're gonna head back up, alright? So hang in there. Thirdly, regeneration. See, when we're down in that dark pit, when we're hating and being hated, when we see our sin and our misery and that absolute hopelessness and helplessness, what happens? The washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Lord. See, tucked away in that definition of effectual calling is this: [WSC Q 31] "... enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ..." That is the work of regeneration that happens in the heart of a sinner when the Holy Spirit is sent upon him. He comes alive in his spirit. We read of this in Acts 2 when Peter who, remember just not too long before, had denied Christ and had spent his own time in hiding and in shame and he's restored by Christ and the day of Pentecost comes and Peter preaches and it says [vs 37], "When they heard this, they were stung in the heart and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" That is the fruit of regeneration in their lives. Acts 26 it describes it this way: as an opening of the eyes, turning [vs 18b] "them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me," the Lord says. Of course we know Ezekiel 36 [vs 26-27], "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them." See, when we are converted, when- when the light does come on and we hate our sin and we desire salvation, that is not because WE had the brilliant idea, it's not because WE figured it out. It's because of the work of the Holy Spirit in us. See, the vastness of the Spirit's work, even those who deny Christ and hate the gospel, when they-- when they face immen-- overwhelming events in their lives and they seem to tough it out and handle it in their own strength, even that is not their own human strength. They don't see it, they don't understand it, they don't grasp it. That work in which the Holy Spirit is restraining evil in the world, that- that gets down into particulars in people's hearts and lives. [John 6:44] "No one can come to Me unless the Father who has sent Me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." Just like those animals were drawn to the ark to be saved, our hearts are drawn to Christ because the Father has seen fit to make it so and we are born again, we are regenerated, we are washed in rebirth, and we are renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Fourthly, here we see justification. [Titus 3:4-7] But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, being justified by His grace... being justified by His grace, we might become heirs... [WSC Q 33] "Justification is that act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone." See, even that exercise of the faith that is given to us is not imputed to us, as some might say and believe. It is all and only of Christ. [Romans 3:24-25] "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith, in His blood, for a demonstration of His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins previously committed," we read in Romans 3. Romans 4 [vs 6], "Even David describes the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness without works: 'Blessed are those whose inequities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.'" Simply put, [2 Corinthians 5:21] "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Brothers and sisters, this is that legal activity that comes through the kindness and love of God our Savior. He justifies us. He justifies us. In one man we fell, in another Man we are saved and redeemed.

But another legal act happens, as well. Not just justification but also adoption. It is also a legal act, whereas justification is a legal accounting term and, while that might warm the hearts of some of you thinking about accounting and bookkeeping and all of that, what warms the hearts of the rest of us is that legal term "adoption." Being on the outside and being brought in, being welcomed, being cared for, being made heirs. [Titus 3:7b] "... we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Adoption is that [WSC Q 34] "act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the Sons of God." Consider how much love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God. See, when we back up to that point on sin, when we-- when we really grasp what we deserve, saints, how can we not help but be thankful, to consider what great love it is for Him to identify us with Him. I've had this experience before (can pick on my kids a little bit) where you're talking to someone you just met: "Oh, which kids are your's" "Oh, my kid is--" and you turn around and they are doing something really dumb. You think, "Well, I thought that was my kid. I don't see my kid right now." The Lord looked at us in our sin. He said, "You're mine." And of course, my kids can do dumb things that embarrass me (like their father before them and his father before him) but nothing as offending and as separating as I've done against my Heavenly Father. And yet He names me and He claims me as His own. There's the name it and claim it theology that you should strive to live in. Christ has named us as His children, He has claimed us as heirs of all the promises, even the hope of eternal life. [John 1:12] "Yet to all who received Him, He gave the power to become sons of God, to those who believed in His name." And that couples so well as the proof text in the Shorter Catechism with Romans 8 [vs 17a], "and if children--" so we're- we're made children-- "and IF children then heirs..." None of you, none of us will step to the heavenly throne and God say, "but not you. See, you just barely make it in, you keep the streets swept." No, ALL of us receive ALL of the promises and ALL of the blessings and ALL of the inheritance that is ours in Christ Jesus. It's absolutely glorious.

So we're sitting in our dumpster of sin and the light comes on and doesn't come on just outside of us, it comes on inside of us and we see our sin and we understand that God has claimed us, He's justified us, He has regenerated us, He's adopted us and yet we're still sitting in this muck and mire. And what happens next is sanctification. "This is a faithful saying," verse 8 says, "and these things I want you to

constantly-- constantly to affirm, so that those who have believed in God might be careful to--" what? "maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to everyone." Sanctification being that- [WSC Q 35] "that work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man, after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness." We are renewed in the spirit of our mind and we put on a new nature which is created according to God in righteousness and true holiness, Ephesians 4 [vs 23-24]. We're not just-- we're not just slain in our sin, we're not just risen in some type of zombie-like state, we are risen to a newness of life whereby we live and laughed and love and- and dance in the freedom that Christ has given us to live holy lives. And we come to understand we were slaves to our trespasses and sins and now we are free to walk a sanctified life where God, not just claims us as His children, He begins to clean us up and we begin to look like and act like His children. We are sanctified and it's in this constantly affirming the glorious beauties of the gospel, saying these faithful things faithfully from the pulpit, at the table and the fellowship hall, around the-- around the Sabbath school room. As we remind ourselves of the glorious riches of the gospel it helps us to maintain good works, to walk in sanctification. And even THOSE aren't something that we've come up with, we were created to accomplish those good works. It's all of Him.

And seventhly, (it's nice to have that perfect number on a sermon like this as we consider the glorious perfections of the gospel) what happens, finally, is glorification. Remember, we are heirs to the hope of eternal life, not just things in THIS life but in the life to come. [WSC Q 37] "The souls of believers are, at their death, made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection." When you breathe your last, your soul, believer, will go to be with Jesus. There's no intermediate state, there's no purgatory, there's no having to go somewhere else to fulfill other ceremonies and sacraments. When you are dead here you are alive there. Absent from the body is present with the Lord. Remember, we looked at that in Job 19 [vs 26-27], "... after my skin is destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God, whom I will see for myself, and my eyes will behold and not another. How my heart yearns within me." Forgive me, I said there's no intermediate state. There is. There's no soul-sleep, misspoke. There is an intermediate state where we are separated and our bodies have to wait. Our- our souls receive that full redemption, our bodies wait around. This is-- Mark Burton and I were talking about this at the picnic, I think, about, you know, what of the believers who were on the boats in Pearl Harbor that went down. What of those who are killed in bomb blasts. The absolute miracle- we- we came away saying, "if you don't believe God can create you in the first place you won't believe that God can recreate you in the second place." And there's some preconditions here, but our bodies rest in the grave until the resurrection. And what happens at resurrection? [WSC Q 38] "... believers being raised up to glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God, to all eternity." See, this hope of eternal life is not just a hope that will exist or a hope that we will be allowed to kind of cower in the corner of heaven and to just be there basking in the light from afar. No, we will be openly acknowledged and acquitted, all the accusations of this world, all the accusations of the enemy, all of the attacks, all of the-- all of the things that come at us in this life we will be acquitted of on the day of judgment. Another thing that we can't quite imagine. We can't imagine our first day of sinlessness and we can't imagine that day when all of it is done away with. Our bodies are sewn in dishonor, they're raised in glory; sewn in weakness, raised in power. We will hear those words of our Master, "Well done, you good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things. Enter the joy of your master." Matthew 25 [vs 23]. First Corinthians 13 [vs 12], "For now we see as through a glass, dimly, but then, face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know, even as I am known."

Glorification, that moment of perfection when God fulfills in us the work that He has set out to do. Well brothers and sisters, this is what we are called to dwell on, to meditate on, and to speak of

constantly. Who we were, how the Lord changed that, the work of redemption in our lives, and who we are today. And each of us is probably in a different place of our understanding and contemplation of it. Some of us today might be well-- all too aware of our sin, of our brokenness, of our lack, of our rebellion against the Lord. Do not forget, if you are a believer, do not forget what God is doing and will do. Do not forget not just- just who you were but who you are and who you will be. There's a danger on the other side, as well, to begin to think that the righteousness we experience, the joy in living that we have, comes from us and not from God and we forget who we are apart from Christ. We forget that we are BEING sanctified (that means there's still some things down in there that need rooted out and dealt with and confronted). Let both sides of the spectrum remember how the Lord changes this. The full import of the work of redemption that finds us in our sin and regenerates us and justifies us and adopts us and is sanctifying us and someday will glorify us. Brothers and sisters, this is the beauty of the gospel, that God sets out to accomplish this and nothing hinders Him. He will finish it. And there may be those among us who do not believe or perhaps have heard and understand but do not believe that it could apply to them. I would call you to consider the kindness and the love of God because it has appeared. Remember for Adam and Eve, as they slid into the sludge of sin, immediately the kindness and the love of God their Savior toward them appeared, the gospel was preached. And so much of human history happened waiting for the Redeemer to come. But it also happened under the promise, the guarantee, that the Redeemer would come. If you are here today and have not believed, the Redeemer has come. You've heard what I've said about your estate apart from Christ, it is not good and there is nothing that you can do to fix it. There's nothing that you can do to earn what Christ would do for those who believe OR to accomplish those things another way OR to find some other path that handles these things completely differently under some other world view. It does not exist, it is not real, you are in a bad spot and the only answer is Jesus Christ. The only answer is to believe on Him, to hope in Him, to be changed by Him.

Stand with me as we pray.