

So, What Now?
Titus 2:11-14
January 1, 2017
PD Mayfield

[The sermon began with Scripture reading and prayer, neither of which were not recorded.]

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. [Titus 2:11-14, ESV]

So 2016 has come and gone. Some of us might be sad. Some of us might be rejoicing at the tops of our roof—the tops of our lungs. But whether you're ready or not, 2017 is here. So, what now? We put away the Christmas decorations and we finish all the leftovers and all the party foods and what we do every year—we start making resolutions. Common resolutions. Maybe you're ticking them off in your head already. But common resolutions are things like losing weight, eating healthily, getting more organized—whether that's in your own home or your desk at work or just your whole life wanting to be more organized—as well as spending more time with family. There's all kinds of variations to those things. There's more I'm sure; it's really limitless what people come up with.

But whatever they may be, resolutions often touch on the areas of our lives that we really value a great deal. They also reveal the areas of our life where we feel the most inadequate, where we feel—where we're lacking, or often where we're failing. We recognize something's missing in our life and so we say: What now? What can I do now that makes my life more enjoyable? What now do I need to bring into my life that will bring greater fulfillment and satisfaction? What now will make my life better? Asking these questions is perfectly normal, and our custom of making resolutions naturally marks a time of reflection of the past year and planning for the year ahead.

Michael Hyatt, a writer and a speaker who I follow—he speaks a lot about business, productivity, life management, goal setting. He's pointed out there's some research that shows that 25% of people who make resolutions quit in the first week. One third fade away after the first month. And six months into the year only just less than 50% are still plugging away. And by the end of the year only 8% of people have kept their resolutions. Now I leave it to Michael Hyatt to speak more knowledgeably and much more eloquently than I can about how to get your life together. So if you want to read his stuff, go—you're more than welcome to do that. Because he goes on to: Why is it? Why do we make resolutions every year, but we don't keep them. What are we missing? Why are we unsuccessful?

So I'm less interested in what we make, as I am more interested in ~~how~~ what our resolutions point to. And it's fascinating how they really are—they're about improving our physique, growing our finances, becoming a better, well-balanced, perfect you. So we make goals. It's even a hash tag: #goals. John Song's always telling me: Goals. Goals. I don't even know what he's meaning. [laughter] He's a man of goals. And I bet he'll be in the 8% that's keeping his. We

work hard. We get tired. We fall off track. And then we wait until next January to start over.

But the Gospel says something different. It's not just about your self-improvement, your best you. And so what I present that something that this passage this morning actually gives us some hope and encouragement for. It counters why I think we often miss the mark in our own resolutions. Because we neglect God's work in our lives by thinking it depends completely on us. And we can restrict God's work through us by passively saying, Yeah, yeah. God's in control, but we actually are very active in ignoring what he wants us to do. So we neglect God's work in our lives, and we restrict God's work through our lives.

So how can we experience God's work in our lives and extend God's work through us? Well, as we look at the passage, we see from the very beginning it's because the grace of God has appeared. And that grace that has appeared has lasting impact on our lives. So we're going to... As you follow the bulletin it'll be: **Waiting, Living, Working.**

So let's look at the first one. The grace of God shapes our **waiting** for the future. The grace of God shapes our waiting for the future. Verse 13 speaks of this waiting for the Christian. It says, "[waiting] for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." What's Paul referring to? Well, he's referring to a future event when Jesus will return. And he's describing this event as "our blessed hope"—those Christians who are believing who Jesus is and what he has done, receiving by faith all that he has accomplished in his life, his death, and resurrection. And that becomes our blessed hope that we are experiencing now—and we'll get to that—but he's saying it's something that is our blessed hope in the future.

And he refers to it even more specifically. It's the glory of Jesus. It's his majesty, it's his power and might. His return will be with all radiance and splendor. And this is what Paul is referring to for the Christian and what we're looking forward to when he does.

But Jesus's future appearing is anchored in a past appearing. Verse 11. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people." Now this grace of God that he mentions, this is the appearance of Jesus the first time, his first coming. It's Christmas, his birth. And this grace of God is the means of bringing salvation for all people. We celebrated it at Christmas. The birth of the baby is the Savior and not just any baby, but Jesus.

Christianity's good news is that it's for all people. It transcends cultural boundaries and barriers. It does not discriminate based on whether you're a male or female, whether you're rich or poor, whether you're from the United States or whether you're from another country, or whether you're from European descent or Asian descent or whatever your ethnicity is—all of these things transcend the Gospel of Jesus. And likewise the need for deliverance transcends all these boundaries, as well. That's the common condition of all humanity. It's fallen and it's in need of a Savior; it's in need of deliverance. And the experience of this deliverance from God is not limited to one group over another. All are welcome, all are invited. And the way to experiencing this grace of God is through Jesus.

We spend so much time, so much of our waking hours waiting. We wait in waiting rooms, we wait in traffic, we wait in lines, and we even lay in bed waiting to fall asleep. As we wait we look forward to our names being called, for the light to turn green, or for the guy in front of you to get off the road. We wait to be the next one served in line. And such waiting is not content with the current situation. You're living in that present moment because you're expecting a future moment to come any time, any time soon. And usually it can't come quickly enough. And so we

live in this waiting that's between times. We live in this space of Jesus's first coming and his second coming.

So what are you to do? What now that grace has appeared? How does this waiting of this future appearing matter to you? I say that it matters a great deal. And so for the Christian, as you hold fast to Christ by faith, you really are holding fast to something that's real and true and something that you can experience now, but it's something that is held secure for a time to come. And so what we do in the meantime is we're meditating on that blessed that hope. We're having our eyes fixed on the future of what that time will be like. It's anticipating, it's imagining, it's longing for things to be made right. It's wanting the tears to be wiped away, wanting death to be no more.

And so in the waiting there is a true discomfort. But how we handle that discomfort actually means a great deal for our lives. And so we're going to look at verse 12—how the grace of God guides our **living** in the present. This grace from God, it—actually here in the verse we read today—it trains, it guides, it informs, it instructs our lives for today. And it does this in two ways. If you look at verse 12, the whole point of verse 12 is to live, to live your life. And Paul is talking about your conduct, your behavior, the patterns of your life, the habits of your life. The point is how you live your life. And so what he does in talking about the Gospel, it's "training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. . ." So that's on the negative side. But it's not just repressing or avoiding or ignoring or denying, by itself. No, it's held together with a positive, as well: ". . .self-controlled, upright, and godly. . ." So this idea of renouncing is really, it is—it's denying, it's refusing to pay attention to, it's disregarding it.

Now these words speak about character. Ungodliness is understood vertically as a lack of reverence for God displayed in, perhaps, sacrilegious words or actions. But basically it's living in ways contrary to true belief about who God is. And those daily practices in your life really are what's contrary to what you believe and what is true. Worldly passions is—well, Paul's meaning it to be negative—but the word passions isn't necessarily negative. It simply refers to a great desire for something. It's a longing. It's a craving. And those things are not necessarily bad, because they can be positive and helpful. We just talked about how waiting is a good part of how we understand our place, our faith in the Gospel. There's a longing, a craving. But Paul does speak about its negative and harmful effects. And he uses the word 'worldly.' This word, even by itself can be neutral, but Paul is speaking about it specifically. He's speaking about not the physicality of the world here, which it can be used in that way, but he's talking about how one's life is lived in a contrary way, that orders your life, that channels your affections, that channels the things you desire. It directs your interests, your longings. That those things are contrary to the will of God, contrary to the beauty and truth of him, to the beauty and truth of what it means to be made in his image. And so he's calling us to live in light of what we believe with right actions.

Now this is something that is foundational to the Gospel. It is foundational to Jesus's ministry, his teaching. It's foundational to all the apostles and their writings. You cannot have a Christianity that separates belief from practice. And we so often get those intermingled and upside down and flipped around, and one gets more attention and the other gets neglected. But the truth is, as we follow Christ and as we grow in him, we are meant to have those wedded together—what we know to be true about God and how we then live our lives in accordance to who he is and what he has done. So to be self-controlled, it's being sensible and moderate, it's being in control of your desires. Being upright pertains to how your character impacts your

thoughts and behaviors. It's being upright and acting justly. Godly just refers to the conduct of our lives, flowing from our devotion to God. So many of these descriptors are similar. They weave into each other, and they're about character.

But ours is a culture and an age that appropriates any corrections as judgmental criticisms, or we internalize them as failures. It's hard for us to enjoy the benefit of growth as we wallow in our perceived failures. And so there's something that we have to hold true about the Gospel, though we want to live in light of these things. Because these words sound great. Especially if you've been raised in a Christian context for any given amount of time these words are often thrown around. And we see behaviors or we see patterns in other people's lives and as examples of *Oh, that's godly living. I'll do that*. And that's wonderful, but also we can distort it, as well, and we impose definitions onto these words that become actually the exact opposite of what it means. We put on burdens, we put on customs that are outside of the Word of God. We'll touch base on that in a minute.

There's an author I follow who writes about the intersection between technology, culture, and ethics. It's kind of one of my personal hobby horses. He writes about artificial intelligence. He writes about the Borg Complex, which is a phrase he's coined. All this stuff that you probably could care less about, but I like it. But what I found fascinating in one of his posts, he was writing about an anecdote about this group of Christians who were traveling through Amish country in Pennsylvania. And they stopped and invited one of the—I don't know who it was, but it was a man in one of the Amish communities. He came on the bus. And their main questions, these tourists, were wondering how do the Amish differ from other Christians. And so first this man explained just all the similarities, you know, all the basics. We have, you know, they have DNA. They wear clothes, even though it's in different styles, and they like to eat good food and spend time with family. The Amish, this man, then began asking the bus questions. How many of you own a television? And most, if not all of them, raise their hand. How many of you believe your children would be better off without the TV? Most, if not all passengers raise their hands. How many of you, knowing this, will get rid of your TV when you go home? No hands were raised. That's the difference between Amish and others.

Now we may agree or disagree with the lifestyle choices the Amish do as a community, but we have to admit that they are committed to sacrificing the perceived benefits of some new technology if they discern the costs for their community become too burdensome, they're too much to bear. In that same article the author quotes James Hunter, a sociologist. And James Hunter was writing. . .the context he was writing about various approaches to moral education in American schools. And James Hunter writes this: "We say we want the renewal of character in our day, but we do not really know what to ask for. To have a renewal of character is to have a renewal of a creedal order that constrains, limits, binds, obligates, and compels. This price is too high for us to pay. We want character without conviction. We want strong morality, but without the emotional burden of guilt or shame. We want virtue, but without particular moral justifications that invariably offend. We want good without having to name evil. We want decency without the authority to insist upon it. We want moral community without any limitations to personal freedom. In short we want what we cannot possibly have on the terms that we want it." In short we want what we cannot possibly have on the terms that we want it.

Something that plays out in my life, as very instrumental in my walk with Christ, is actually coming to grips that Christianity is not moralism. As a younger child growing up that's very much what it was. It was observing what you were to do and what you were not to do. Come

close to the line, maybe tip your toes over the line, sometimes, but not very often. And kind of see where you land in comparison to other people and then you're a good person, and that is something God likes. But Christianity is not moralism that garners esteem or favor in the eyes of God. Nor is Christianity to be used as a cultural bludgeon to organize what is good or bad, in order to cultivate one's sense of self-worth compared to others. But. . .but. . .Christianity does involve a moral framing to how we conduct our lives in light of who God is and how he works.

This is what Titus is talking about, or rather Paul is talking to Titus. He's writing a letter, a very intimate, personal letter to a friend. And he's saying while you are ministering among the churches these are the things you should preach, these are the things you should talk about, these are the things you should be in community around, as you seek to be shaped and molded into a community of disciples following Jesus. It does involve our actions and our behaviors, but it's not dependent on those. We don't earn God's love. We don't earn his favor.

So we're going to look at verse 14. The grace of God **works** with a purpose. Verse 14 speaks about how Jesus gave himself for two reasons. He says he “. . . gave himself for us . . .”, so the first one: “to redeem us from lawlessness.” This idea of paying a ransom, of buying back that which is just free from all sense of order or law, like actual civil laws, perhaps, but Paul's most likely talking about a sense of responsibility and duty to how you live your life before God. So God through Christ gives himself. So that's the basic component for two reasons: to redeem us, but then the second one is “to purify for himself a people.”

So what is incredibly beautiful about this verse—and I hope you see it—is how those things are woven together. And how—do you remember from all this fall how this is actually very covenantal language. He's even making allusions to Exodus 19, this idea of a people for his own possession, buying them back out of the bondage of their own devices, giving them freedom and life with God, that God would be their God and they would be his people.

So just as the grace of God and Jesus is the means by which we are saved, it is also our motivating purpose for why we are saved. Do you remember the rich young ruler? He had many possessions and he asked Jesus, What must I do to be saved? Well, we know the story or the point of that story. The person who experiences a saving grace of Jesus doesn't ask that question. ~~That~~ The person who experiences the saving grace of God asks, Now that I am saved, what must I do in response? How must I live? And this involves discipleship. Every generation must be disciple. Every generation must make disciples. Every generation must help a new generation become disciples. Every new generation must come into their own as disciples. Every new generation must look to make new disciples. Every generation watches one generation grow old and pass away. Every generation watches another generation be born and grow up. And the cycle continues. Every generation must be disciple.

Worship. That's part of our discipleship. It's us coming here to be gathered to worship God and give him praise. To say true things about God, but also to have true things declared about who God is and who we are in him. Our singing is a fragrant offering to God, but it's also a way that we learn of rich theology and beauty and poetry, and have those things affect us. I don't know about you, but I was incredibly moved by Ashley singing, to hear the word ‘Hallelujah’ sung in a beautiful note is sometimes more powerful than saying the word.

This is how discipleship works in worship and how that plays out in our growing, in our learning. Because it does—as the passage shows us—it trains us to do these two things. Elsewhere Paul talks about putting off and putting on. Putting off the old self and putting on the new self. This

does involve work. It's first and foremost—and I can't stress it enough—it is completely dependent upon the work of Christ: in his life, his death, and his resurrection on our behalf. He gave himself for us as a ransom to redeem us, but also to cleanse us, to purify us, to sanctify us, to make us more and more and more and more like him. That we would sound like him, that we would look like him, that we would smell like him.

And the discomfort in that is that we're never there where we would like to be. The discomfort is there because people don't always think Jesus smells good. And they might think we smell bad, too. The grace of God works with a purpose: working in salvation, but working out a ministry of his people who are zealous for good works. This idea of being his possession is not anything new. This is like, I said, straight out of God's interaction with Israel. Israel had a purpose. They were to know God, to follow his rules, obey the statutes of the covenant. But not just to be this secluded people purifying themselves so they're just ritually clean or morally clean—but they were to be that to be a mirror, to be a reflector, pointing to the nations of this great God. And the church today is likewise this.

And so the Gospel, this grace of God, is the mechanism for our salvation, but it's also how we then order our lives in response, for what we will be looking at more in the coming weeks, our vocation. And that involves the spheres of our life and involves our own inner selves and involves the relationships in our family and it involves our skills and what we do in this world to provide value to our neighbors, to our coworkers, to our employers. That ultimately all these things is our worship to God—is cultivating, it's cultivating a garden, it's having dominion, it's bringing forth life and flourishing.

So, what now? The gospel is salvation, and it is a salvation from the rebellion and brokenness that separates us from God. It is a salvation from the misery and pain of this present world. And this salvation, friends, this salvation is a gift. This gift cannot be earned, it cannot be taken, it cannot be manufactured, it cannot be counterfeited. This gift is given through Jesus. He is the source and he is the motivation that we must keep in sharp focus. Because the grace of God has appeared. It impacts our future and it impacts our present. The birth of Jesus, his life given at Christmas, to his death and resurrection at Easter, the grace of God has come and it changes everything.

May each of you individually and may CPC as a whole, as his church, experience the grace of God this year. May our waiting be shaped by Jesus's glorious return. May we live our lives in keeping with the Gospel, and may we be characterized as eager to do good works in the name of Christ. That idea of good works will get unpacked more in the coming weeks as we talk about vocation. Because we are not saved by works, but we are saved to do works, that we would be a blessing to those around us. May we give praise to God for how he is a blessing to us through his Son.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we do thank you. Hallelujah. We praise you for your salvation. We praise you for your grace in our lives, that we come to faith, but then you put your law in our heart by your Spirit. You give us a new heart that wants to obey, that desires to follow your ways. Help us to walk in this newness of life, the freedom that we have in your Son, Jesus. We do pray for the year ahead, Father. We set it apart as something that we give to you in our worship, our spiritual worship, that we would be transformed by your mercy. And may you use us in ways that are glorifying to you and beneficial to those we may spend time with. We pray all these things in Jesus's name. Amen.