

There was a boy who had very little athletic ability, and every time he and his friends would play some kind of team game, he was always the last to be chosen. One day two new boys came to play with them and were allowed to be team captains because they were bigger and older. Surprisingly, the first team captain graciously chose the boy who had always been chosen last. Why? Because they were brothers, and he loved his little brother.

So, it is with God. By amazing grace, He chose us not because of our intelligence or our abilities or our shining personalities, but simply because He loves us.

Beginning this morning and for the next several weeks – maybe six, we are going to slow-walk our way through a small letter of amazing grace written by the Apostle Paul sometime around 63 A.D. to a younger brother in Christ named **Titus**.

Now Paul we know well, but Titus is a young man we know little about. He's never mentioned in the book of **Acts** but we know he was with Paul, for we find him mentioned in Paul's letters to the **Galatians** and to the **Corinthians**.

Titus was a Gentile believer who was apparently led to Christ by Paul during Paul's first missionary journey. Over time, their relationship grew to the point that Titus served with Paul as a fellow worker on his third missionary journey – during which time Paul sent Titus on a special assignment to the church at Corinth to help them with a crisis they were experiencing. So, through their work together, Paul had developed a great deal of trust and respect for this capable young man named Titus.

Years later, Paul and Titus made their way to the Island of Crete. Crete is a large island in the Mediterranean Sea southeast of Greece. It's a mountainous island measuring some 150 miles long by 30 miles wide at its widest point. In Paul's day, it was a Roman province with about a hundred cities, several important harbors, and heavily populated with a people who had a very nasty reputation.

The people of Crete were a tough and wild bunch. They were infamous for treachery and greed, they were violent and immoral, and they considered lying to be culturally acceptable. It was said, *to be a Cretan was to be a liar*. These were a difficult people, whose history goes way back into Old Testament times. Do you remember the dreaded Philistines? They were the arch enemies of the Israelites and they came from this island. So, Paul and Titus had their hands full in Crete, but it's not all bad for some Christians were already on the island.

If you recall on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out, people were there in Jerusalem from all over the place, to include some, we are told, from the Island of Crete. **Acts 2** tells us that Cretans were there – they got the full Pentecost experience, they heard Peter preach, and we are told on that one single day 3000 people were saved and some were certainly Cretans. So, there were some believers in disorganized home churches already on the island when Paul and Titus arrived, but still, it would be no cake walk for them. They had some difficult and demanding work ahead of them and they jumped in with both feet, but eventually there came a time for Paul to leave, and he left Titus behind to lead in organizing and shepherding the churches.

That's the setting of this letter, so if you have your Bible, turn to **Titus 1** and I am only going to read the first four verses.

¹Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, ²in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, ³but at the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior, ⁴To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

If you can look past the verse numbers, you will notice that this passage actually forms one long sentence that seems to build upon itself, presenting us with one thought-provoking truth after another. This is a greeting, a long greeting, where Paul gives Titus some principles to guide his life and ministry.

In his greeting, Paul describes himself as a **bond-servant of God**. That word "*bond-servant*" is the Greek word *doulos* which is another word for *slave* and it carries all the images you might think of when you think of a slave. In a nut shell, a slave is a person who is the property of another – a person who's own will is swallowed up in the will of another. That's what it means to be a slave, but in Paul's case, the meaning goes deeper than that.

In the Old Testament, as far back as **Exodus**, God's people had an economic system set forth in the Law of Moses, and this system included rules for those who found themselves in debt. Essentially, those in debt became the slaves of the creditor, but fortunately, that slavery had a termination date. When the seventh year rolled around, all of the slaves were set free and they could go forth once more to be their own masters. Now for some of them – not all, but for some, they

remembered what it was like to be free in a harsh and cruel world – it wasn't that good, and they realized they actually had it better as a slave. Their masters were gracious, they were cared for, they were housed, and they were well fed. They saw this new found freedom as something to be feared, and so the Law of Moses provided a way for these people to voluntarily and willfully remain as slaves to their masters.

According to instructions found in **Exodus 21**, a slave could go to their master and say they wanted to remain permanently bound to them. The slave would then be taken to the tabernacle where the priest would lead the slave to the doorpost and pierce the ear lobe with an awl, and from that time forward, the slave would belong to the master as a bond-servant, and wherever the slave walked, that pierced ear was a symbol of love for the master.

Paul was a bond-servant – willfully bound and surrendered to God – this lowliest of positions was his greatest honor – he wore it like a pierced ear, and although not perfect by any stretch of the means, in every aspect of his life, Paul had chosen to follow his Master – to do God's will, or maybe better said, Paul made God's will his own – he wanted what God wanted, and that led Paul to a special calling as **an apostle of Jesus Christ**.

The Greek word for **apostle** literally means “*one who is sent*” specifically, one who is sent by Jesus Christ, with God's authority to preach the gospel and to establish churches under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

In the early days of the church, God called special men to do special tasks, and among them were apostles. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, He had many disciples who followed Him, and from these He chose apostles. An apostle was to have been an eyewitness to Jesus after His resurrection, he had to have been specially commissioned by the Lord for this role, and his apostleship was to be verified through the results of his spiritual service. We know that Judas betrayed Jesus and eventually killed himself, and I believe that it was the Lord's plan all along to fill that vacant position by none other than Paul.

Paul is a *slave*, and he is a *sent one* – sent **for the faith of those chosen of God**. Paul knew who he was and what he was supposed to do. He was a surrendered servant with a clear three-fold purpose – first, to share the gospel of grace so that the **chosen of God** might respond with a saving faith. Now the way I said that might be a little confusing – prompting the question: *Did God choose us or did we choose Him?* That's an old question, it's a touchy question, and I think the right answer and the best answer is simply “Yes.” Biblically, both apply – it's a

paradox. Before the foundation of the world, before anyone could do anything or be anything for that matter, believers were graciously chosen by God, and those that He has chosen must respond to Him with a saving faith in Jesus Christ. Again, it's a paradox. So, Paul's three-fold purpose begins with sharing the gospel – to bring the truth to the chosen so they might believe and be saved, and then secondly to build up the chosen, to nurture their knowledge of the truth so that they might grow in **godliness** – and let me explain that.

What we believe, what we understand, what we know to be true, should have an influence in how we act, or said another way, our *inward* beliefs should be reflected in our *outward* behavior.

For example, a person who understands the truth pertaining to the law of gravity should act accordingly and put on a parachute before jumping out of an airplane. What we know to be true influences our actions.

With that understanding, in that light, when it comes to **godliness** that means our lifestyle, our normal way of life should be consistent with what we know to be true about God. As we grow, the truth we gain about God – whether by knowledge or by experience, should have an impact in our lives.

So, Paul's three-fold purpose was first sharing the gospel, secondly to build up believers so that they might grow in godliness, and lastly, to encourage believers to face the challenges in this life until they reach their eternal destiny in the next.

If you notice in this passage, Paul anchors **eternal life** with the word “**hope**”. Now, to many people, **hope** means “*maybe*” – as in “*I hope it doesn't rain today*”, or “*I hope I get a new Ford Raptor someday.*” In these cases, the word “hope” is nothing but wishful thinking, used for things that are uncertain, but in the New Testament, when it comes to **hope** there is no *maybe* about it – true hope is a certainty that something God has promised will happen. What He said will be – will be.

It's that kind of hope – the hope of knowing God, **the hope of eternal life** that keeps people like Titus hanging in there during difficult and demanding times. It helps one to weather the storms over the long haul.

Our hope is a rock-solid hope because our hope is secure in the character of God – a character that does not change. Our certainty, our hope rests upon the character of the God who makes promises – the God who **cannot lie**.

Now that little comment from Paul – “*God cannot lie*” introduces us to an underlying issue in this letter. One of the problems in the Cretan churches was that they had a distorted view about the One true God largely due to their pagan views about their Greek gods.

The Cretans were steeped into Greek mythology, they claimed their chief god – Zeus was born on their highest mountain, and they acknowledged that he had a very questionable character. Zeus was thought to seduce women on a whim, he had a lack of sympathy for mortals – he saw them as play toys, and he would deceive others to get his own way.

Paul wants to be really clear here for he knows this letter will be read to the churches in Crete. The God revealed in Jesus Christ is totally different from their mythical god Zeus, for the basic character traits seen in Jesus are faithfulness and truth, which means the Christian way of life will be about faithfulness and truth – which will be a drastic change for these Cretans.

God’s character will not allow Him to lie – He cannot lie, and because He cannot lie, the hope of eternal life for those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ is a certainty.

In the 60’s and 70’s, Steve McQueen was a top Hollywood actor who led a life as tough as the one he portrayed on the movie screen. Success filled his life until alcohol and a failed marriage left him empty. In his despair, he attended a crusade led by one of Billy Graham’s associates. McQueen made a profession of faith and he requested an opportunity to speak with Billy Graham. Fortunately, a connecting flight in Los Angeles allowed Dr. Graham to spend a couple of hours with McQueen where Dr. Graham shared numerous scriptures about eternal hope and assurance.

*McQueen struggled with the thought of God giving eternal life to a man who had such a checkered past; however, in **Titus 1:2**, he found words that really spoke to him – the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago.*

McQueen requested something to write down the verse, but Dr. Graham gave McQueen his Bible instead. Four days later, McQueen died in Mexico while seeking experimental treatment for his terminal cancer. He passed into eternity clutching his Bible to his chest.

Our God is a promise-keeping God. What God says He will do – He will do – in His time, and Paul explains that in God’s time, the truth of salvation by grace

through faith in Jesus Christ was revealed. It had been previously hidden, but now at the **proper time** it was brought to light through the **proclamation** of God's word – a word that Paul said he was entrusted with by the command of God – a word that was then committed to Titus, and since passed down to us.

Now, I want to side step for a moment and say something about God's proper time. What God says He will do – He will do, but it will be done on His terms and according to His timetable – not ours, and I don't know about you but sometimes I struggle with this. Sometimes I have a hard time with God's time. Again, I don't know about you – I'm sure I'm the only one, but for me, sometimes, it seems that God takes way too long to come to my aid leaving me a little discouraged and even disappointed with Him.

Now the truth is, God is never late – His timing is perfect – He's not the problem, **so then what is the problem?** Well, here it is: I want things my way. I want things to happen on my terms and on my time. I expect God to act on my behalf the way I think He should act on my behalf. Basically, I am more concerned with what I want instead of what God wants for me.

I have to be reminded that God is faithful and true because that is His character, and He will do what He says He will do, but He will choose to act or not to act according to His perfect will and timing, and in the meantime, I am left with trusting and depending upon Him knowing He has a purpose and a promise for me.

In **verse 4**, Paul brings his greeting to a close where he refers to Titus as **my true child in a common faith**. In the first three verses, Paul described himself as a bondservant who was submitted to his Master. He was an apostle committed to God's mission and message, and here we see Paul as someone deeply concerned about God's people – like a loving parent in the case this young man Titus. Paul says, **Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior**. Grace is what brings salvation and peace is what comes from it. Grace is what saves and peace is what we experience because we are saved.

Paul and Titus were two different men, coming from two different cultures, with two entirely different backgrounds, in different roles, at different stages in their spiritual journeys, in different places, and yet they shared a common faith in Jesus Christ. They were saved by grace the same way, and in their own ways, both felt compelled to follow and serve the Lord – whatever that might look like – wherever that might lead. Both were chosen and equipped by God with certain gifts and abilities suitable for their calls, both were given very difficult and demanding

assignments, and both faithfully walked the path that God had set before them, and you know what, as a child of God, I could plug your name in there as well. Now you may balk at that thought – you're no Paul or Titus, but you don't have to be. You have been chosen by grace just like them, God has a purpose for you too, and there is no telling how God may use you if you are willing to let Him.

A Water Bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one- and one-half pots of water to his master's house.

The perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made, but the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the Water Bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you." "Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?" "I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The Water Bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his grace, he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure. The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other side?" That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way, you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."

We're all cracked pots, but by God's grace, He has chosen us and as we walk faithfully along the path that God has set before us, He can use us – just as we are, even with our flaws to serve His divine purposes.

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