

TITUS - WHY PREACH? (Titus 1:1-5)

This letter begins by showing us why we should preach. It is probably one of Paul's three last letters (the other two being I and II Timothy), and was likely written shortly after 62 A. D., after Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, and not long before his final martyrdom (also in Rome).

Let us look first at the life of Titus, and then at the reason Paul gives for this letter.

I. The Life of Titus

In Titus 1:4, Paul affectionately calls Titus 'my true son after the common faith.' Titus had been begotten by the preaching of Paul, and in one sense, was as close to him as a natural son is to his father. I have found that you feel very close to people who get saved under your preaching. '*Common faith*' means that it is common to both Jew and Gentile (Paul was Jewish, and Titus was Greek). The true faith has no racial, ethnic nor national divisions: it is the same for the whole world.

Everywhere Titus is mentioned in the New Testament, it is always positively. We are told in Galatians 2 that Titus had accompanied Paul to Jerusalem, where Paul was soon arrested. Titus stood with Paul against the Jewish legalizers in Jerusalem, who wanted to add circumcision as another requirement for salvation, and so, although Titus was a Gentile, Paul refused to circumcise him in Jerusalem.

Titus is mentioned nine times in II Corinthians, which shows how active he was in the work of the early church. Indeed, he was entrusted with a letter to the Corinthians (called 'the severe letter' – different from our I and II Corinthians). Paul had been worried about why the mission of Titus was taking so long, but was greatly comforted by the return of Titus from Corinth to him in Macedonia, especially because brought him good news about the repentance and love of the Christians in Corinth.

After Paul was released from house arrest in Rome, he left Titus as a missionary pastor in the Island of Crete (Titus 1:5). There we take leave of Titus, and look forward to seeing him above.

II. The Reason for this Letter

Verse 5 tells us that Paul left Titus as his chosen representative in Crete for two purposes: (1) 'to set in order the things that are wanting' – that is, to straighten out the things that are unfinished, and (2) to appoint elders in every city. This letter was written to help Titus in both these tasks.

- (1) 'To set in order the things that are wanting' (i.e. to finish the necessary business so the life of the church will run smoothly). What this 'necessary business' is will be shown us in chapters 1 through 3, and will be discussed on later Sundays. And we will also study what it meant to appoint godly elders.

But before we look at the two things Titus had to do, let us look at the authority of the Apostle Paul, who commands him to do these things, and shows the blessing of following what he commands. Paul identifies himself in two ways, that may seem to go together strangely: one the one hand, he calls himself a servant (which means slave in Greek), and on the other, he calls himself an

apostle. One is very low in estimation of the world, and the other is very high. But Paul sees himself as both at the same time!

(a) The Authority of Paul

First, he is the slave of God. That is a strong term, and there was a great deal of slavery in the Roman world of his time. Probably we Southerners do not feel too comfortable with slavery, since our ancestors kept it going until 1865. We can readily see why anyone would react against the very idea of slavery; that is, when one is enslaved to another human. Humans are imperfect and self-interested. Who of us would wish to belong to another human being? They own you, control your movements, and have charge over your whole life.

However, it is very different when we are slaves, or servants, of God himself. Everything about this institution is transformed when it is in the context of belonging to the gracious covenant God. The Anglican Prayer Book has a wonderful sentence: 'Whose service is perfect freedom.' God has the moral right to ask us for everything, because he gives us everything! He asks for no more than what he freely gives us, and in giving it back to him, we find that we are free and happy, and instead of taking more, he is always giving us back more!

Jesus Christ was the pre-eminent servant, or slave, of God. Many chapters of Isaiah prophetically describe what this meant for him: the servant of the Lord. In particular, Isaiah 53 shows how low he went for our sakes in this calling: *'He was bruised for our iniquities, and wounded for our transgression, and with his stripes we are healed.'*

Because we belong to him, we have been set eternally free from our worst enemies: sin, death, judgment and hell. Paul says in Galatians 2:20 *'Christ loved me and gave himself for me.'* Therefore, for us *'to live is Christ and to die is gain.'* *'Our life is hidden with Christ in God.'* Thus, the most noble phrase that can be used to describe us is that we are Christians, or saints; we belong to Christ, body, soul, and spirit. In him we have everlasting life and endless joy. To serve him (to be his slave and adopted brother) is to live at the most noble level; to reflect who God really is. We will do well to follow Paul as a slave of the Lord, for whom beautiful mansions are prepared in glory. Thereby, we are protected from slavery to self and to Satan all through this earthly life.

By the way, you and I will always be enslaved; for no man lives to himself. We will either belong to the world, the flesh, and the devil, or to the glorious Lord God Almighty. Those secularists who think they are free from religion and superstition, do not know how bound they are to the passions of self-interest, which are constantly stirred up by Satan, and leave them totally unfree, without hope and without God in this world. Look at the lives of some of the rich and the famous, and see where they wind up! I remember the end of one handsome movie star many years ago. He was dying of AIDS, and said near the end to one of his Christian friends (also a famous movie star), I do not see how God could let this happen to me! But he had chosen slavery to his own passions. Maybe he repented, but if not, he paid a high price for enslavement to the wrong thing.

So Paul gladly enlists himself among the slaves of God. But secondly, he says that at the same time he is *an apostle of Jesus Christ* (Titus 1:1). This means one who is divinely chosen, and *sent out* (the basic meaning of 'apostle') with the full authority of God himself. There were only twelve original apostles, and apparently

Paul was added to the number after his conversion of the road to Damascus. One had to have seen the risen Christ in order to be an apostle, and this apostleship in many cases gave one the authority to write Holy Scripture, so that what he wrote was what God himself said (cf. II Timothy 3:16).

Apostleship gave one the divine right to organize the churches, and to make binding decisions (as in the Apostolic Council of Acts 15). This is how Paul had the right to tell Titus (and the others) how to set up the structure of church life for the rest of history.

(b) The blessings from Paul's servanthood and apostleship.

Titus 1: 2 shows that all that Paul was doing was the putting forth of eternal life: *'In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began.'* If you ever have a passing thought when you are leaving an open grave: how do we know he or she is still living in another place? Say to yourself: *God cannot lie.* If we were extinguished at death, it would mean that God has lied to us, and that is utterly impossible for one who is holy and true. Look at your ancestors' portraits on the wall. You know they still live in a different realm, for *God cannot lie.* I have said that more than once as I walk down the stairs in the morning, and look at the faces of so many deceased ancestors. God promised them eternal life, and they are now enjoying it.

In the next verse (Titus 1:3), Paul shows the glory of true preaching: it transforms the lives of those who hear it in faith, so that his word is 'manifested' to them; it becomes real, and they are changed into his glorious image. Through preaching of the Gospel, they behold the face of Jesus in faith, and so *'are changed from glory into glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.'* That is why preaching is commanded by God (verse 3), because it is the way he touches and transforms from the deathly grip of Satan into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

In the autumn of this year (2017) we will be celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, from the time of Luther, Calvin and the others. (I will be traveling many places to preach about the Reformation in the next few months). But I can simply tell you here that the essential mark of the sixteenth century Reformation (which is what brought it back into line with the apostolic church) was preaching of the true and full Word of God written, in the power of the Holy Spirit, who inspired that Word. One historian said over a hundred years ago that the preaching of the Gospel renewed the face of Northern Europe.

That is why Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and Knox preached so many times a week. It was like pouring the life-giving waters of God upon the thirsty multitudes. That is also why, I think, in most cases a sermon needs to be at least thirty minutes long. It takes that much time to open up the Word of God written, so ordinary people can understand it, and take it into their hearts. That is also why we need, as the months and years go on in a ministry to preach all parts of the Bible, as best we are able. That preaching is life-giving; it is morally transforming.

The late Rev. William Still in his *The Work of the Pastor*, which I have used all my days, and have taught it to thousands of ministerial students, explains why we need to cover as best we can the various parts of Scripture: Old and New Testaments, Law and Prophets, Gospel and Epistle, and all the rest. Mr. Still says that 'the whole Christ is in the whole Word', and that we need the whole Word preached to us, in order to be shaped into the beauty of the Lord, who inspired that Word. Preaching is paramount in the Church and on the mission field, because it alone

(when attended by the Holy Spirit) can transform individuals and entire nations. But this Word can only be properly preached in the context of a sound Bible-believing Church (as we see in Titus 1:5). What such a church looks like, we will be studying in weeks to come.