

By Mercy, Not by Works

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Bible Verse: Titus 3:4-5
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Well, today our message comes from Titus 3, and I invite you to turn to that wonderful short New Testament epistles, 46 verses, power-packed with instruction for Christian living, and as we're going to see with the magnification of the Lord Jesus Christ and his work of redemption on our behalf. I'm going to read verses 3 through 7 to begin our time here today with a particular focus on verses 4 and 5 in our message. Verse 3, Titus 3,

3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. 4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Now we're teaching through this passage on Sundays and Tuesdays, and so this past Tuesday I know not everybody was able to be with us, last Tuesday, five days ago, we looked at verse 3 in detail. It's kind of a central text in understanding the doctrine of the depravity of man, but it looks back at Christians in their former way of life and describes what we once were, describes the way that we were spiritually before God had mercy on us and saved us. And what we see in verse 3, which is a description of people currently who are not in Christ, this is a description of every unbelieving person no matter how outwardly moral he might be.

Verse 3, God's assessment of humanity is this, "we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another." Not going to dwell on that verse since we dwelt on it for 80 minutes on Tuesday. I couldn't believe the clock when I got out of the pulpit. We've looked at that verse and now what we see is that that has set a contrast for us. It has given us a black backdrop, you might say, to be able to look and gaze at the perfect 500 carat diamond of the grace of God by contrast, and jewelers will set diamonds against black velvet in order to make them appear more radiant in their appearance, the contrast makes the jewels stand out all the more. Well, when you see the truth about

humanity and see the truth about your former life in Christ, it gives you a contrast to understand better the wonderful kindness, the wonderful love, the wonderful grace of God in saving you because it was to the unworthy creatures of verse 3, it was to the disobedient rebels of verse 3 that God showed forth his saving grace, and it is so important for us to understand and to let verse 3 sink deeply into our understanding and into our hearts, let that sink in deeply because only then do you understand by the necessary contrast where salvation must have come from. Beloved, if you and I were disobedient and deceived, hateful and hating one another, if we were enslaved to lust and pleasures, and we were spending our life in malice and envy, then something should be obvious to us, that God did not receive us and did not welcome us because we were such good and worthy objects of his affection. That is not the case. This does away with the thought that I could go to heaven because my good deeds are a little bit more than my bad deeds; that God just loves all men indiscriminately and all men will be saved in the end. That's not true. Jesus said that there are comparatively few that will be saved, and that there will be many who cry out in surprise on the day of judgment, "Lord, Lord, did we not do all these things in Your name? And how could you possibly be sending me away?" Jesus will say, "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness."

You see, beloved, we must come to grips with, if you are going to be a Christian at all, at some point you have to come to grips with there was nothing in you that prompted the grace of God, there was nothing in you that merited a response of love from God because the picture of you and me in our sin is bleak, it is one of rebellion, it is one that deserves judgment and separation from a holy loving God, and the starting point of becoming a Christian is somehow having that dawn on your understanding, "I am a lawbreaker before a holy God. I am guilty before Him. Justice demands my death and punishment." You know, it's one thing for someone to say, "Sure, I don't deserve to go to heaven." It's one thing for someone to say that, that can be nothing more than a nod to false modesty, however. The testing point for whether you understand the biblical assessment of yourself in sin is this: do you agree, do you acknowledge, do you openly and freely confess this, "Not only do I not deserve to go to heaven, by right, by the nature of my sin and rebellion against God, I deserve to go to hell." You see, it's both an affirmation and a denial. "Yes, I deny that I deserve to go to heaven," sure, but the other side of that coin, and they cannot be separated in a true confession of repentance and faith is this, "Yes, I deserve to go to hell. I deserve to go to hell."

I remember the moment when that thought dawned on me at the moment of my conversion, and the sheer terror that it struck in my heart. There was no arguing the point. I knew deeply by work of the Spirit of God in my heart and the work of, you know, it's the work of the Holy Spirit to convict men of sin, judgment and righteousness, I knew that I was sinful. I knew that I deserved immediate judgment. I knew that there was no righteousness in me and it was that which the Lord used to cause me to cry out to Christ. That's the nature of true salvation, in one degree or another, those elements are present. You know, Jesus came to save us from sin and he came to be a Savior and a propitiation for our sins, as we read in 1 John 4 a little bit earlier, right? Jesus didn't come to save you from a bad marriage. He didn't come to save you from poor self-esteem. He didn't come to save you because life was going to be too hard for you. No, no, it was a matter of your

standing before God, your guilt before God, and the condemnation that your sins deserved, and the nature of the work of the Spirit of God in someone's heart, a true work of the Spirit of God is it brings them in to understand that and to confess and acknowledge that. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, but someone who clings to their pride and resists the idea of condemnation, rejects the idea that God has a right to judge those who violate his law, who in pride refuse the label of sinner upon themselves, beloved, that spirit, that thinking, that kind of person is saying this, what they're really saying is this, "I reject the Lord Jesus Christ as He is presented to me in the gospel," because the gospel says that Christ came to save sinners and to call them to repentance. Someone who rejects the label personally of being a sinner, someone who says, "I'm good enough for God and I resent, I resent being told that I might be guilty before Him," someone who has that attitude deep in their heart is simply confessing that they are not a Christian regardless of what they may say about themselves and how they might change the definition of Christian so it can apply to them. Scripture is clear. We were foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts, malice, envy, hateful, hating one another. I ask you, beloved, this is all of us, this is humanity here and on what basis does humanity in general or any one of us individually when that is the verdict of Scripture upon our lives and upon our hearts and upon our very souls, upon what basis do we say we have any merit, any entitlement to the grace of God, salvation, and eternity in heaven with a gracious, holy, loving God when the verdict of Scripture is against us.

And so, you know, these things have consequences. These things matter. What Scripture says, the truth of God matters and it has far-reaching implications, and I'm not concerned what people outside the church might say in response to these texts. You know, the Lord's brought us, has brought you here into this room here this morning, and so I'm simply asking you what your real reaction in your heart is to these things and to the conviction that Scripture speaks against you. Do you embrace the verdict of God and accept it and say, "Yes, that's right, that's true about me. That's what I once was like. If I were in hell today, it would be just and I would have no complaint against God. It would be righteous. It would be wise. It would be best if that's the way that God had dealt with me."

Now the fact that we're all still breathing here today, the fact that many of us are in Christ and our sins have been forgiven and we have been reconciled to a holy God, then it's incumbent upon us to understand how that came to be. How is it that a guilty wretch like you and me, we now find ourselves accepted in the Beloved? That God is favorably disposed to us? Where, where did that come from? How is it even possible for a holy God to show kindness to an unworthy creature, a sinful rebel? How's that even possible? In the words of Job, how can a man be just before God? That's the question. A Catholic would point to, you know, the ceremonies that they've done and prayed to Mary. "I've been to confession. I've been to Mass. I haven't committed any mortal sins." You know, and all pointing to what they've done or haven't done.

You know, there's something I should say because it was prevalent in my thinking before I was a Christian deep in my heart, I never would have articulated it like this because it's

so shameful when you realize, you know, when you hold it out to the light to be exposed. But you know, you're not righteous just because you have avoided certain kinds of sins. You know, that's one of the things that I did and I justified when I was not a Christian, I justified, I justified my life, I declared my life righteous, I was not under conviction of sin because there were certain sins that I had not committed and that was the proof, it was a negative proof that I was better. You know, and in moralistic legalistic churches, man, this is a common way to think. You know, I've kept the rules. I haven't done this or that, you know. I don't smoke or chew or go with girls who do. And all of that, all of that is just dung. It is a filthy rag. Isaiah says all of our righteousness is like a filthy rag before a holy God. We have to come to the end of ourselves. We have to come to the end of whatever claim it is that we've done or haven't done that we would use to justify ourselves before God, to distinguish ourselves from other sinners as being worthy of grace, we have to do away with all of that. I don't know how to be any more plain or explicit about it.

And so we have to leave that behind in order to enter into the text today because what Paul wants to do in this letter, what he's doing at this point is he says, "This is how you did enter into the favor of God. This is how it came to pass. It was not by your works. It could not have been by your works. That's utterly impossible. That would be a denial of everything that Scripture says to think that a man could earn his way into the presence of God. God would have to deny His own word, He would have to deny His own Son, He would have to repudiate the cross itself in order to accept men according to their own merit."

How was it that an unworthy creature like you and I were forgiven and saved? How was it that God brought salvation to unworthy creatures like us? Well, that question leads us into the blinding glory of the gospel. It brings us into a mind-shattering display and revelation of pure light of the goodness and the kindness of God, and the contrast could not be clearer or more necessary in its implications. Look at verse 4. We have dealt with the sin of man now, and now Paul is changing the subject, so to speak, he's looking away from man and onto God with what he is about to say, away from man in sin and onto Christ in his love and mercy and goodness. Verse 4, "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us." So if this is about kindness, undeserved kindness from God, and Paul immediately emphasizes what he has just said in verse 3. He says, "He saved us," and he immediately issues a disclaimer. He says, "not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness." Nothing about your salvation is found in anything that you did. No particle of merit before God is found in anything in you apart from Christ. It is not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness.

Then what is it? What do we offer to men to be saved if we're not offering them a program of moral improvement in order to get in favor with God, what are we offering them? Something far better, the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Middle of verse 5 there, "but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace, we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Beloved, look who is the subject of the sentence here. Look at who it is that is doing what to whom. Who is doing what to whom? Let me say it again because. I know some of you aren't used to thinking in terms of grammar, but grammar is what unfolds the Scriptures to us. Who is doing what to whom? Verse 5, "He," referring to God in Christ, what did he do? He saved. Who did he save? He saved us. God acted upon us to save us, to deliver us from judgment, to deliver us from condemnation. God did something to us in our sin in order to change us, to forgive us, to cleanse us and to give us a free gift that we did not deserve.

How did it come to us? Verse 4, it was the kindness of God. It was his love for mankind. The gospel unfolds for us the nature of God, the character of God. What is God like? We read it earlier in 1 John 4, God is love. God is a gracious giving God to unworthy sinners and his kindness and his love for mankind here in verse 4, it refers to his goodness. It refers to his generosity toward unworthy men in distress. There you were covered in filth, covered in guilt to the very core of your inner man, having no desire for God, no motivation toward God, hateful and hating one another. That's you. That's what you were like and what Scripture is saying here, what the word of God is saying is that while you were like that, God had mercy on you. God showed love and kindness to you in your guilty black distress in order to rescue you and deliver you from what your life and character and soul actually deserved. It had to be pure, undiluted favor and kindness from God because there was nothing in you or I that naturally appealed to him because God is a God who has indignation with sinners every day. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

And so what we're going to see here this morning is that to those who were lost in sin God displayed undeserved love in Christ, and we're going to approach this with two major points here this morning. First of all, we want to look at the manifestation of God's kindness. The manifestation of God's kindness. You could say where did God reveal his kindness? Where did he show it? Where did he make it known? Where has the kindness and love of God appeared? That's really a question for the ages. That's a transcendent question. How are we to know? How are we to know that there is a God, and if there is a God, what is he like toward those that have rebelled against him? Well, think about it in a historical sequence this morning to fix this in your mind as we build from this text and the broader context of Titus 2 and 3. Where has God manifested his kindness in time so that you can be assured of the reality of his love, that he is favorably disposed to sinners, that he offers mercy to those who do not deserve it in a way that gives you a basis and a warrant to come to him for forgiveness of your sins and know with certainty that he will receive you and not turn you away?

Where has God made his love and kindness known? I want to give you a historical sequence to think about it. I'll give you an overview and then we'll go back and look at each one briefly in sequence, okay? Where has God made his kindness known to you? I'm talking to believers now. First of all, 2,000 years ago he displayed his love and his kindness at the cross of Jesus Christ. When Christ was hanging in the place of sinners as a substitute bearing the punishment in the place of sinners who would believe in him, that was a display of the love and kindness of God in an undeniable objective way. So you

can start there 2,000 years ago. Let's bring it into today's realm, and what I mean by today is in the period of your lifetime, and now I'm speaking only to Christians. Where has God displayed his goodness and kindness to you? He showed goodness and kindness to you at your conversion. When God saved you, when the Spirit of God opened your eyes and the Father drew you to Jesus Christ and gave you the gift of repentance and faith that you could exercise and he caused you to be born from above, and he delivered you from darkness, Colossians 1:13 and 14. He delivered you from the kingdom of Satan and delivered you into the kingdom of his Beloved Son, beloved, that's basic Christian theology. That's your conversion. Well, understand, look back at that and anyone who is a genuine Christian looks back and says, "Yeah, that's right, God was gracious to me then. I came to Him, whether as a little child or as an adult, I came to Him fearful of the consequences of my sin, fearful of judgment. I cried out for mercy from Christ and what did He do? He gave it to me. He saved me. He was so kind to me in real time, in my real life, and I now live in the glorious aftermath of that initial display of the kindness of God to me at my conversion." You look back 2,000 years ago, you see it on great display for all the world to see. You look at your conversion and you see the Spirit having applied redemption personally to your heart, and you realize how greatly good and kind God has been to you.

Then there's one more step in the sequence. This is just the overview before we get to the good stuff in the details, right? It's at the consummation at the end of time as we enter into eternity and we are in the fullness of the presence of God, the immediate presence of God, we see Christ face to face. He has changed us and glorified us so that we are never tempted again. No more tears. No more sorrow. No more pain. No more death. No more crying. And we're with him in heaven forever never to be threatened or tempted. No more division. No more rejection. No more worries just the fullness of the goodness of God. At the cross, at your conversion and at the consummation, beloved, what I want you to see here this morning is this, is that woven through and that royal purple cord of majesty that actually extends all the way back into eternity past when God chose us. You could do it that way, you know, God chose us in eternity past, the cross, your conversion and the consummation, there is this royal, unbreakable rope of kindness that God has shown to before we were even born given to us in this brief period of life and extending throughout all of eternity, all of that is displaying before your eyes in an undeniable way the kindness of God toward his people.

So let's look at this, the manifestation of God's kindness. Verse 4 again here, "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared," and our question is when did that appear? When has that been displayed? When is it going to be displayed? Well, it has been displayed at the cross of Jesus Christ. An informed view of the love of God, beloved, it doesn't even start with your circumstances. That's where so many people go wrong is that they assess the love of God based on their circumstances today. To rightly think about the love of God, you have to extract yourself from your circumstances whether they are good or bad, and look at these matters of eternal principles, of eternal truths, eternal verities, you might say, and start there, start at the things that transcend time, transcended your life, and let that establish the context in your mind for what the love of God is really like. And in one sense, you could start about the love of God in

election but today we're starting at Calvary. An informed view of God's love for mankind begins at Calvary and we're starting there simply because that's really where the context of this passage leads us. We'll leave for another time the broader discussion of the love of God in election. But an informed view of God's love for mankind begins at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Look at chapter 2, verse 11. Chapter 2 verse 11, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men." Salvation is freely offered to Jew and Gentile alike, in other words. "Instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age." He mentions our God and Savior Christ Jesus in verse 13 and then talking about the grace of God appearing in Christ, as we kind of collapse the context to see the clear train of thought in Scripture, he tells us what Christ did that displayed the love of God, the grace of God. The grace of God appeared, verse 11, Jesus Christ, verse 13. What did he do in verse 14? He "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."

Beloved, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was a public manifestation of the goodness, the grace, and the kindness of God. This shows the favorable disposition of God toward sinners. Jesus Christ in love, in unrequited love, in predominantly unrequited love goes to the cross knowing that the wrath of God was just ahead. He set his face, the gospels tell us, he set his face for Jerusalem because that was going to be the city at which just outside the gates he would be crucified. He was set on it. He left his glory in heaven above. However the unified essence of the Triune God works, he left the Father's throne above, left the glories of heaven and the accolades of angels, born of a virgin, born in a manger, living for decades on this earth with no place to lay his head, rejected at the time by his own immediate family, rejected by the religious leaders, rejected by those who said they were his disciples but when the teaching started to contradict their own passions and desires, they took off and left. And why? We could ask it reverently, "Lord, why would You do that? Why bother? Why not just exercise Your prerogative of justice upon all of these rebels and be content with sharing the glory of Your Father in the presence of the holy angels and not be bothered with all of it?"

The cross gives the answer. It's because he's not selfish with his glory. He's not selfish with his love. Jesus Christ is so intrinsically kind, he is so intrinsically loving and gracious and good to those who don't deserve it, and in his incarnation he is manifesting what the entire Godhead is like, the full essence of God, the fullness of deity dwelled in him in bodily form we're seeing displayed in humanity what God is like and he is so kind that even at great personal expense and the full weight of eternal wrath of God on innumerable sinners laid upon his back, he's so kind that he willingly laid down his life for sinners like you and me. Jesus said in John 10:18, "No one has taken it away from Me for I lay it down of My own accord. I lay it down voluntarily." He was crucified not because the Roman authorities came and got him, not because Judas betrayed him, not because the Jews held him up to Pilate, ultimately he was crucified because he wanted to be. It's the way he wanted it and he wanted it because of his love for his people. He would not have us perish alone. He would not have us perish in darkness. He would not

have us continue under the dominion of Satan to be consigned to eternal judgment with Satan and the false prophet and the beast, to be sent away into the lake of fire from the Great White Throne Judgment. Christ preferred to sacrifice himself, he preferred to suffer himself than to see us suffer like that, and get this, he preferred to suffer when he did not deserve it so that you would not suffer when you did deserve it. Whatever else you say about that, you have to admit that's pretty kind. That's remarkably good. That's wonderfully gracious. That's so merciful. And remember, he's the one who holds judgment. He had the prerogative to do the exact opposite and rather than exercise his prerogative and preserve himself in the process, he laid aside the independent use of his attributes, he dwelt as a man on earth, he went to the cross in order to rescue sinners like you, like me, foolish, disobedient, deceived, hateful, hating one another.

I don't know how you possibly contemplate this and not in your heart just bow and your face just falls before him on the ground. "O Lord, such goodness. Lord, I'm not worthy to look on that goodness. I'm not worthy to hear of this goodness. And yet, here I am, here I am dwelling in the luxury of it all. I who came to You," Luke, 15, "I came to You in torn, smelly rags of pig filth and You called forth the glory of heaven and said, 'Wrap him in My robes of righteousness. Give her the best ring. Kill the fatted calf.'" All of the resources of God will be put at his disposal. Why? Not because there was anything in the pig filth that appealed to God but because his heart is so intrinsically generous and loving and kind. God displayed his invisible kindness to the world at the cross of Jesus Christ, and, beloved, if we do nothing else today, if we do nothing else today, for some of you but to demolish the thought that that's some kind of theoretical concept, that that's just an intellectual construct with no moral claim on you or some kind of construct that doesn't move your heart at the very depth, if we can demolish that we will have done something in the grace of the spirit of God in this act of preaching here this morning because this kindness manifested at the cross of Jesus Christ is flesh and blood kindness that he paid for with his own blood at the cost of his own life, and if we do nothing else today corporately as Truth Community Church, we will offer up the sacrifice of praise to the kindness of Christ that he displayed to us at the cross. That's our corporate response and the question is whether it's your individual heart response as well.

The cross of Christ. You know, let's go back for just a moment to 1 John. I read it earlier during our Scripture reading. 1 John 4. If you can anchor your thought to measure the love of God by the cross of Christ, if you can anchor that, it will get you through so much in life when it seems to be contradicted by your circumstances. 1 John 4:9 and 10, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." This is the love of God. This is the kindness of God. Any discussion of the love of God in any circle anywhere must go, must make a direct beeline to Calvary or else you're missing the most important point of them all.

So where did God manifest his kindness? At the cross. Second place that he manifested, it wasn't just in one place, the second place that he manifested his kindness, as we said, was at your conversion. At your conversion. God displayed his kindness to you at a

different point in time. At a point in history 2,000 years ago, Christ died on a cross. For those of us that are in Christ today, at different points in time in our lives, at different points of the unfolding calendar of the history of man, at a point in time in your life, he showed kindness to you when he opened your blind eyes, when, metaphorically speaking, he touched your deaf ears, when he touched your dumb tongue and loosened it, when he turned the light on in your dark heart, when he broke the chains of Satan and your sin, all of these different metaphors, all of these different metaphors – stay with me, beloved – all of these different metaphors that point to the same reality that Christ, that the Lord Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit worked in your heart set you free from a position of slavery, of darkness, of inability, and gave you a gift by his own power and that was actualized, that became real in your life at the moment of your conversion.

Look at verses 4 and 5 of Titus 3. Verse 5, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." That word regeneration, pointing to the reality of being born again, new life generated in your heart. God showed kindness to you. God laid his hand upon you and, beloved, I have to ask you, especially those of you that have grown up in Christian homes or at least nominally Christian homes, you know, and you've never been taught anything really contrary unless maybe it's been in a public education system, but I have to ask you whether these things of which I speak today of which I know the Spirit of God is testifying to the truth of them in your heart, whether these things have become yours personally by power or whether this is still just some construct to you, whether this is just some motion that you have to go through because it's what your parents have you to do, and it's not something that's captivated your heart and changed all of your affections and your entire perspective on life. Is Christ precious to you or is he just some story out there? Is the word of God a living and active book to you or are you like I once was and it just sat on the shelf unopened day after day, week after week, year after year, and your indifference to the word of God and keeping it closed, doing your best to muffle the testimony of God about your sin and the grace of God in Christ? How can a man or a woman, a boy or a girl who has truly been born again, who's truly a Christian, how is it possible, how is it possible that the affections of their heart aren't drawn to the book that testifies of the realities that they say they possess? I ask you, how is that even possible? Let me answer my own question. It's not. It's not. It's not. A heart that has no interest in the word of God has no possession of Christ because the Spirit that saves us imparts to us a desire for this book, a supernatural affirmation that this is the word of God and to one degree or another, we have no option but to respond to the promptings of our heart, "I've got to know what this book says. I need to read it for myself."

Is this you or not? You can harden your heart against it. I don't know why you would. Help me understand something. Help me understand why anyone would righteously harden their heart against the kindness of God displayed at the cross and displayed in the act of conversion? There is no excusing that. At the very least, if you're here and you're that kind of hypocrite today, at least do everyone a favor and drop the mask and drop the hypocrisy and say, "I'm not a Christian. I don't care about these things." At least we can at least deal with each other honestly then, right? But we're speaking predominantly to

believers here today. Isn't it sweet to remember and to look back on how the Lord showed kindness to you? Maybe it blows some of the dust and cleans off some of the accumulated things of the world and you look at it afresh and say, "That was sweet. And you know what? The same Lord who saved me then is still gracious to me today. I can come to Him. I can confess my indifference. I can confess the careless way that I've walked and let myself stumble into sin. I can come and know that I'm going to receive the same fresh mercy all over again. And then I can renew my heart today in the grace of God, in the love of Christ, because if He loved me at the cross, and He loved me at the conversion, He loves me today." And all of this just becomes an invitation to come back to your first love. Church of Ephesus, Revelation 2. Jesus says, "I have this against you. You know, you're great in doctrine but I have this against you, that you've lost your first love." I fear that for our church. I do. I fear it for some of us individually.

Where is your love for Christ in response to his kindness? Beloved, I invite you to renew your heart and refresh your heart by remembering that while you were hostile to God, the Spirit of God opened your heart to Christ in a display of magnificent magnitude of mercy and grace. The Holy Spirit applied redemption to you and gave eternal life to you. And beloved, that's kind. That's so gracious. That's so loving. That's so merciful. He rescued you when you did not deserve it. Titus 3:5, he saved you, and then as I said, where is this kindness displayed? At the cross, at your conversion, and at the consummation.

Go back to Titus 2 now. Titus 2. As you're turning there just to say that as wonderful as it's going to be to be in heaven with the saints of all the ages, as wonderful it's going to be to be reunited with our departed loved ones, our friends in Christ, those who loved us and disciplesd us and showed kindness to us and to meet new saints from prior ages, as wonderful as all of that's going to be, it's nothing compared to the glory that is going to be ours to be in the immediate presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, gazing upon the face of the one who loved us and gave himself up for us, who loved me and gave himself up for me, Galatians 2:20. The glory of heaven is not going to be preeminently in the cessation of earthly difficulty and labors. It's not going to be preeminently in being with the saints of all the ages, although those things will be great and wonderful in and of themselves. The greatness of it is going to be when we see Christ face to face and we are made like him because we will see him as he is at the consummation.

Titus 2:11, "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men." What are we doing in the context of that great salvation? Titus 2:13, we are "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." It's not preeminently about what's happening now. The blessed hope, the confident expectation in being a real Christian is that there is something even better to come. It's when Christ comes back, we are with him and we see him as he is. I can't wait for that and I can't imagine how glorious it's going to be. I've said this before, one moment, there's a hymn that says this, I probably won't get it out right. "Just one glimpse of Him in glory will the toils of life repay." When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be.

I really think if I just saw his face for a moment, saw it face to face undistracted in the fullness of his love and acceptance, and he said, "Don, that's it. There was so much about

your life that I covered. This is it. There's a corner in heaven for you over there. You go be there. You can stay but this is it. That's all." If that's all that it was, I speak as a fool, I speak as a madman to describe the love of Christ treating me like that because he won't do that, but if he did, if he did, I would go to that assigned corner in heaven and I would sit throughout all of eternity with a great gratitude, "I saw Him face to face and nobody can take that away from me. That is so imprinted on my mind and upon my heart that it ravishes me with a sense of glory and love and appreciation and that's enough. That's enough. I saw Him resurrected and He looked on me in love."

Every point, every purpose of my existence has just been fulfilled. That's enough. The consummation and then you realize, beloved, and then you realize that that one moment that would be sufficient to ravish the believing soul forever in in a sense of glory and gratitude, you realize that that one moment is going to be exponentially and eternally and geometrically magnified throughout all of the unfolding ages of eternity, you realize that the kindness of God has barely even started, that Christ died on the cross to achieve that greater end in eternity, that Christ saved you at your conversion in order to bring about this greater fulfillment where the greatness and the undiminished goodness and kindness and love of God is bestowed upon you forever and ever without end. And to whatever extent if there's any sense of perspective that we have to make a contrast between the glory of Christ in this life and what it will be like in the consummation, there's going to be a sense in which we say, "Man, what was so wonderful on earth, what was so gracious and satisfying on earth, that was nothing compared to this."

Ephesians 2:4 and 7. Don't turn there, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." He saved you not for what you get out of it in this life, not to deliver you from problems today because the problems don't necessarily go away, do they? It's for a greater purpose yet to be fulfilled. It's so that in the consummation we will spend eternity utterly astonished at his goodness to us. I'm just so eager for that day to come, I just kind of want to jump into it right now.

How did we ever come to receive such majestic love? Well, I need to cover this really quickly. What was the motivation for his kindness? We've seen the manifestation of his kindness at the cross, at our conversion, and in the consummation to come. What's the motivation for his kindness? Why is God doing this? I'm restraining a lot of passion in the way that I'm asking that question right now. Why is God doing this to Titus 3:3 kinds of creatures? Why are we receiving this? Why have we received this? Why will we receive the consummation to come? Titus 3:5. May God by the power of the Holy Spirit banish every self-righteous thought in any of our hearts in this moment. May the Spirit of God take the word of God and apply it with power to every heart in this moment. May the power of heaven come down on us now in response to the word of God and impress this upon us in a way that it is never lost on us ever again, rebuking the rebellious and confirming the saints and the faithful in the truth of the word of God. "He saved us,"

Titus 3:5, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness." He showed us all of this mercy, yes, but it was not on the basis of anything that we had done. It is not by your works. You cannot grow as a Christian unless you understand this. You cannot be a Christian unless you understand and embrace and confess this, unless you affirm this from the bottom of your heart, "It was not about me." It was not about you.

Salvation is not a reward for good behavior, beloved. It's not a payment at the end of your work day. You did not, you could not, you would not have done anything to earn God's kindness. He did not save you in response to infant baptism. He did not save you in response to any religious ceremony. He did not save you in response to you walking an aisle. He did not save you for giving money to anyone or any organization or any other kind of good works that you did. It wasn't any of that. You simply never were entitled to anything from God. Anything, let alone the majesty and the magnitude of his kindness that we've seen here today.

Scripture emphasizes this so, so much. Ephesians 2:9, "you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Galatians 2:16, "a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified." To my unbelieving friend, I tell you, you receive this gift of Christ by faith alone. The channel by which God dispenses this blessing upon you is by looking to Christ, receiving him and resting in him alone for your salvation in a repentant spirit that says, "I see the glory of Christ. Have mercy on my sinful self. I take You for all that You are and all that I've heard from Your word. Be merciful to me, the sinner." By faith alone.

Titus 3, look at it there, "not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but," instead, not by works but by mercy, "according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." Beloved, at this point I probably can only repeat myself from what I've already said so I need to wrap this up before this turns into the Sunday evening service. God had compassion on you if you're in Christ and he delivered you from sin. Your salvation is found and grounded in the mercy of God alone. It is based on the righteousness of Christ alone. Salvation finds its source in a gracious and merciful God, not in a worthy man or woman. Christ provided the basis in his death on the cross and in his life of righteousness, the Holy Spirit applied that to your heart, and all of this kindness from the cross and in your conversion, God will display greater degrees of that quality of kindness throughout all of eternity.

Beloved, you and I, true Christians everywhere, we do not worship at the altar of moral superiority. We do not worship at an altar built by our own righteousness. We worship at the foot of the Lord Jesus. We recognize mercy at the foot of the cross. Is that what's true of you, my friend? Is that what's in your heart in response to Christ and his blessed word?

Let's pray together.

God, we lack the human words to respond rightly to these glories that You have given to us in Your word and in Christ and so we just ask You to take them by the same gracious spirit that You first saved us to deepen them and sanctify all of this to our hearts that we might grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. And Father, I pray this morning for that person maybe by all outward appearances a backslider who had tasted of grace and had walked away from it, and yet somehow they stumbled in here today. I pray for that young person in the stubbornness of her own heart, rejecting up until now the things that have been said. I pray, Father, that by Your merciful, powerful Holy Spirit that You would open eyes and open hearts that the full fountain of grace might flow to each one here that there might be an abundant rejoicing taking place in hearts new to the faith and confirmed in the faith, that we might afresh see the mercy and kindness of God revealed to us at the cross, in our conversion, and yet to come in the consummation that You might have the loving adoration and worship of our hearts which You so richly deserve. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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