

By Mercy, Not by Works
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We're continuing through our study of Titus and I invite you to turn to Titus chapter 3 and in anticipation of the message that I knew I was going to be bringing to you this morning out of God's word, I have to tell you that it was almost strange last night. I woke up and the things that are about to come were fresh on my mind, of course, and it occurred to me that there's a sense in which - let's put it this way - Scripture says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and if we were to discuss what makes God fearful, we would talk about his holiness perhaps, his wrath for certain, the reality of eternal judgment on those who reject Christ. All of those things are really fearful things but this is not what we're talking about today and yet I find myself magnifying the fear of God this morning as I step into this pulpit with the most unusual thought that even the goodness and kindness of God is a fearful thing. Fearful in this sense, it's fearful because as we're going to see, it is so alien to anything that we know in any other context. It is so foreign and contrary to what we deserve as individuals. It is so fearful because it is so great. It is so magnificent. It spans from eternity past to eternity future. It is magnificent and great in the unfolding nature of the way that God is good to his people and even primarily in the way that we experience his goodness in earthly life, in our earthly circumstances, that is utterly incidental to the glories of the goodness and it's just so vast. It's so magnificent. It's so wonderful in the deepest sense of the word. It is so awesome that it's fearful. Fearful because it's so great. That's what we're going to see here this morning.

Titus chapter 3. Last week we saw the blackness of sin that we used to know as believers and that marks all men who do not know Christ, who have not been born again. Titus chapter 3, verse 3, look at it just so that we can set the context here. Paul says and actually the context goes up even further to verses 1 and 2 where he tells us to honor civil authority, to be gentle and gracious and peaceable with unsaved men and he goes and explains why he calls us to that. He says, verse 3, he says, "For we ourselves were also once foolish," it's emphatic. He says, "Remember that you were just like that. You used to be like what I'm about to describe." He says, "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." That was the backdrop of what we looked at last time: unworthy creatures, unworthy men and women. That was us. That was us and yet what has happened to us that are Christians? What has happened to us in that realm of darkness that we participated in? That we loved? That we embraced? That we were dead

in? That we were enslaved to? That we had no way out? And not only did we not have a way out, we didn't even want out. What happened? What happened to us?

In verses 4 through 7, Paul gives one long Greek sentence that explains what happens to us and which undergirds his call to us to live a transformed, peaceful life in the world around us. Here's what happened to us. Here is a magnificent display of the goodness and the kindness of God to us in that foolish, disobedient, hateful, condition. What happened? What did God do for us? Verse 4, but in contrast to that foolish state, in contrast to the rejection that we deserve from a holy God, in contrast to that, verse 4

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.

We're going to spend next week talking about this passage as well as today; maybe the week after that we'll see. There's so much here but, beloved, here's where I want you to start at: I want you to see the theme, the atmosphere, the environment in which Paul is speaking to us now because he's no longer speaking about the realm of dead darkness that marked us, he has moved our thinking, he has transferred into the realm of the gracious character of God and that's what permeates the atmosphere of what we're talking about here today. Just look at the nouns in verse 4: the kindness of God; his love for mankind; his mercy, in verse 5; his washing; the renewing by the Holy Spirit richly poured out upon us through Christ Jesus; justified by his grace according to the hope of eternal life. We're going to unpack all of that in the next week or two but I just want you to see the environment that we're in now as we come to this passage of Scripture. We have left the darkness of man and we have entered into the light of the goodness of God and you and I who are Christians here today are the beneficiaries of that grace, that magnified, magnificent, exponentially beyond all that we could ask or think, goodness and grace and love and mercy of God. That is the realm of our existence as believers.

And I want to say a word to those of of you that aren't in Christ. What we're speaking about as believers here today enjoying in the realm in which we know God invites you and calls you into the same realm through faith in Christ. He's not stingy in the offer. He doesn't restrict it. The word goes out to all men everywhere. Oh, if we could shout. If we could stand on top of the world and declare it so six billion people would hear, we would say, "God is gracious and merciful and kind to sinners. Come to him and be saved. He is disposed to be good towards you and he has displayed it over and over and over again." And so if you're here or apart from Christ this morning, understand that the words that you are hearing is once more a plea from a holy, gracious, loving God saying, "I'm calling you out of your sin into the realm of my kindness. I'm calling you out of darkness into light, out of hatred into love, out of indifference into a joyful embrace of the things of Christ." There is a holy grandeur to this which, by all rights, men are not worthy to speak of, this is so magnificent.

Now, we need to enter into the text with that little bit of introduction. Chapter 3, verse 4, look at it with me again. But notice the contrast: there is a strong, magnificent contrast between what he has said in verse 3 and what he is now going on to discuss. That word "but" there, that strong contrast, is a hinge in the passage. A hinge where grace had been shut out because of the darkness of sin, now here with this word "but," the hinge of the door is now turning and we are entering into a realm of unexpected grace, of unexpected glorious kindness. This is a contrast. He says, verse 4, "But," while we were like that, while the whole world was lost in the darkness of sin, but then something changed, "when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared." Scripture calls Jesus Christ our Savior. It refers to God the Father as our Savior as well. He is every bit as much disposed toward a gracious saving attitude as Jesus Christ is. There is no distinction between the two of them. God the Father is our Savior; he is the one who planned it all. He sent Christ to execute it. The Holy Spirit applied it. The whole Triune God is involved in this great kindness and mercy to us.

"But when the kindness of our God and Savior and his love for mankind appeared," this verse refers to the fact that God is good. Good in the context of salvation. He's good. He's generous. He's generous to men and women, boys and girls who are in the distress of sin. Those who are in chains of darkness, God comes and is gracious to them. Picture if you will, a man in chains locked in a dungeon fifty feet under the earth. Dark, nothing around, no keys and he's just there in that miserable condition with no one there to come upon him and he hears the sound of feet coming down the steps and the door opens and light comes in and it's the Lord Jesus Christ saying, "I have come to rescue you out of your helpless condition." That's a picture, a poor picture, of what this passage is describing. Nowhere to go. No way to free ourselves and the kindness of God our Savior and his love for men in distress appears on the scene. To those lost in sin, he displays undeserved love. For those of us who were not seeking him but rather we're seeking our own sinful lives, he sought us. Oh beloved, please understand, please understand that if you are a Christian here today, when Scriptures says it's not because you and I wanted God, it's because he wanted us. He sought us in our sin. When we were walking away, as it were, he whistled and brought us back. That's goodness. That's kindness. That is unspeakable, great, fearsome love that we're looking at. To those of us lost in sin with no claim on him whatsoever, we stand in the realm of amazing grace. We stand in the realm of one who has bestowed blessing upon us that we did not deserve. We stand in the realm of one who has shown kindness to us that we did not deserve.

What Paul starts to unfold as we move on into verse 5, we see two aspects of this kindness that we want to bring out for you this morning. First of all, I want to talk to you about the manifestation of his kindness. The manifestation of the kindness of God toward us who are believers in Christ. The manifestation of his kindness. Stated differently, to use a different word, we might ask this question: where has this kindness of God appeared? Where has it been made known? Because let's start from a really important starting point: God is perfect and immutable in his character. Part of the intrinsic nature, one of the inherent attributes of God is that he is good. His goodness is eternal. He is eternally good. He is eternally kind and he has always been that way and he is kindly

disposed toward humanity. He has shown in the fact that he sends the sun and the rain on the just and the unjust alike. He's a good God and he has always been that way. He never changed. To change would be to suggest that there was something imperfect to begin with. No, no, no. This God of whom we speak has always been perfectly good and perfectly kind. Always. But God is invisible to us. We can't see him. He's like this but we can't see it unless he makes it appear. Unless he somehow manifests it, unless he somehow makes it known to us, we would never guess that it was like that. We would have no grounds upon which to say and we could only speculate. God has not left us to speculation, he has manifested his kindness. Look at verse 4 with me again. Chapter 3, verse 4, "But when," there's a temporal aspect to what's going on here, there's an expression of time involved here, "when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared," he pulled back the veil and sent it out and made it manifest; he made it known. He displayed something that eyes could see and that hands could touch. He displayed it in time and didn't simply leave it in the realm of unseen eternal attributes. He made it known.

Now, I'm thrilled to be able to unpack this for you. There are certain privileges that we have as Christians to be able to think through these things and to understand them and to see them clearly and this is something that we need to see and take our time with: the manifestation of his kindness. Where has the kindness and love of God appeared? When did he do this? Is he done displaying his kindness? Well listen beloved, you can think about this in a scripturally-speaking and even within the passage here in Titus, what you're going to see and what we're about to discuss, is that there's a historical sequence in the manifestation of God's kindness toward us. He didn't just do it once and then stop. He has displayed his kindness again and again and is going to do it even more still future to us today and the perfections of this are unspeakable. Human lips are not worthy to speak of what God has done. They are not worthy to speak of the kind of kindness, the quality of goodness that we are about to see laid out on the plain surface of Scripture. There is no reason for any sinner to turn away from this kind of kindness.

Where has God shown his kindness? I'm going to give you three different places all pertaining to the reality of your salvation as a believer in Christ. Where has the kindness and love of God appeared? What has Paul been talking about? First of all, God manifested his kindness at the cross of Jesus Christ. At the cross of Jesus Christ he manifested his kindness. Go back to Titus chapter 2, verse 11 and watch as we go through this. Look for the time at which these different things were displayed; when they appeared; when God made them manifest. Verse 11, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men. Instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires." We've looked at those verses. Verse 13, "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." Remember, he's talking about when the grace of God appeared. When did it appear? Verse 14, here is the grace and goodness of God on full display. Our Lord Jesus Christ, verse 14, "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." When Jesus Christ went to the cross to carry the weight of our sin on his shoulders, that was an act, a manifestation of unspeakable goodness and kindness. You remember don't you, that he said that, "I could call a myriad

of angels and put an end to this." It wasn't because he was powerless at the face of Roman executioners or the Jews who blasphemously handed him over. He wasn't powerless. He wasn't crucified because he was too weak to stop it. He was crucified because he was so good that he went to that cross and offered up his life as the price of our salvation. Those of us who were unworthy, hateful, foolish and disobedient with no claim on that matchless Son of God, no claim on him whatsoever, he looked at his people, as it were, in kindness and said, "I will lay my life down for you to redeem you out of your miserable condition and secure for you an eternity of blessedness that eye cannot see and tongue cannot describe."

Beloved, whatever else we say about the Lord Jesus Christ, let it be forever settled in our minds that he is kind. He is good. And part of the way that we need to understand this is by way of contrast with our own lives. You and I are both alike in the sense that when people cross us, we react against it. We're like that. It's part of our fallen nature. We don't like it when people don't do what we want them to do. We don't like it when they are unkind to us seemingly without reason. We react against that. We worry about it. We get angry about it. It makes us bitter, sometimes for years. Well, understand that our offenses against Christ did not change his kind and good disposition toward us. What a manifestation of grace. What a manifestation of goodness. Christ on the cross working out, knowing full well, he's working out an eternal plan of God. He's working out salvation for his people through all times. Do you want to have a sense of how great and fearsome and wonderful the goodness of God is towards you? Oh beloved, realize that 2,000 years before you were born, our Lord Jesus Christ in kindness went to the cross and laid down his life for you. And understand alongside that, you and I have just got to come to grips with this: he did this before we asked. He was ahead of the curve. He did it before anyone could have possibly asked, not that we would have, but 2,000 years ago, generations upon generations before you and I were born, Christ was being good to us when he went to the cross and that invisible attribute of the goodness of God was displayed publicly at a Roman crucifixion site in the land of Israel. With no external compulsion other than his desire to honor his Father's will in salvation, Jesus Christ voluntarily laid down his life for you and me. That's good. That's kind. That's so undeserved. That's such compassion and pity upon people who were miserably lost.

Oh, don't you see it? This is no theoretical concept, this is literal flesh and blood kindness manifested by God at the historical time and space event of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It's displayed. It's manifest. It has appeared. It's historical fact. It's established for all time. Let every Christian have embedded on his tongue, "My Christ is good. My Christ is kind. My Christ is loving. My Christ is gracious. He is merciful and he's been merciful to me. He displayed it at the cross. It's been made known. There's no arguing this point." But do you know what? And here's where I just get lost in discussing this: that work of Christ was perfect. That display of goodness was perfect. There was no defect in it whatsoever. And yet as we are going to continue looking at Scripture here in just a moment, and yet we see that God has taken other aspects of perfect kindness and stacked them on top of the perfect kindness of the cross. There's just this exponential manifestation of perfect goodness and one level gives rise to another realm of perfect goodness that strains the limits of human language to express.

Do you want to know where else God has shown his goodness and kindness to you as a Christian? It wasn't just at the cross. He displayed his goodness, his kindness to you at your conversion. At your conversion. That's what Paul's talking about here in Titus 3. Look at it with me again. 2,000 years ago, it was publicly manifested this goodness and then Paul now is going to talk about a reality that is intensely private and personal and internal to the heart of the believer. Look at Titus chapter 3, coming at it from a completely different dimension. It wasn't just a general kindness that God displayed, he took it and made it personal to you and me by name. Look at verse 4, "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us," as we move into verse 5. Now stop for just a second because I want to make something really clear here: some people, some commentators that I've read said it doesn't say "when"; it doesn't say "when it appeared" here. Others say that he's referring to the coming of Christ as being a display of God's kindness. Well, it's true that the coming of Christ was a display of great kindness on the part of God but do you know what? That's not what Paul's talking about here. He's talking about something else. Remember this is one sentence, verses 4 through 7. He's gone to something else in describing the manifestation of the kindness of God; it's a different episode in which that kindness was displayed. To say that he's referring to Christ here, the coming of Christ in his incarnation, is to ignore the rest of the sentence and this is important for you as a believer to understand because this gives you a broader sense of the greatness of the goodness and the kindness of God to you.

What's he talking about here? He says it. How can you miss it? Verse 5, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness," we're going to come back to that in just a moment, "but according to His mercy," we're going to come back to that in a moment. Here we go, here's what we want to talk about right now: when was the manifestation of the kindness of God that Paul is talking about, when did that occur? What's he talking about right here? Here it is in verse 5, don't miss it. Paul, what are you talking about? When was God kind to me? You've already talked about the crucifixion. He's talking about our personal conversion in verse 5, "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." When did you receive the Holy Spirit? When you believed. When was it that you were converted? Listen, listen, listen, it was when the Holy Spirit worked on your heart. It's when the Holy Spirit opened your mind to understand the Gospel. It's when he took your heart of stone out and replaced it with a heart of flesh that was willing to receive and hear these things. He washed you. He cleansed you, in other words. He took that crucifixion work of Christ and applied it to you personally by name. He washed you. He regenerated you. He gave you new life. And I know I'm talking loud, I can't help it. I really can't help it. This is too great to speak about in terms as if we were just talking about what we were going to have lunch. This is the kindness of God and here you and I were, dead in our sins and either through something that we were reading or a preacher that we were listening to or a friend talking to us over coffee, somehow, someplace in your historical past if you're a Christian, the Holy Spirit came to you through those words that were displaying the word of God, displaying the Gospel to you, and opened your mind to understand. The light went on

where it had been darkness all before. So many of you are like I was, thought you were a Christian when you weren't. You were just dead and black in it and you were saying you were a Christian and yet God didn't leave you in that realm of self-deception. He didn't leave you to that realm of blackness. The Holy Spirit came and did a work on your heart and displayed by, watch this, displayed in his saving, converting power upon your soul, displayed to you the goodness and the kindness of God. He took that great work of kindness from 2,000 years ago at the cross and he made it personal to you in your heart. How can we talk about that without, and I'm condemning myself here, how can talk about such undeserved goodness without tears streaming down our cheeks? How can we talk about this as though we're indifferent to it. No, no, this is overwhelming. This is a tidal wave of goodness coming over our souls. This is the goodness of God being manifested and displayed and if you're a Christian, you can say, "God manifested it not only at the cross, he manifested it to me personally on the day of my conversion," whether you can remember the calendar date or not. I can. 25 years and four days ago, November 20, 1983, God manifested his goodness to me, working on my mind, convicting me of sin and leading me to repentance and faith. An utter display of undeserved goodness to a sinner who said, "Yeah, I'm a Christian, of course."

Don't you see it? You see, you should be thinking now and here is what this does, this is why this is so crucial for you to think rightly about, you see, it's because it's so real and tangible in a sense. We should be thinking about God's goodness like this: not just as an attribute of his, glory be to God that it's like that, but we shouldn't think of the goodness of God simply as an abstraction. Going further, we rejoice in the goodness and the kindness of God manifested at the cross and we love him for that but it doesn't stop there. When it comes to the way that you as a Christian think about God, you should be thinking about it in intensely personal terms related to your conversion. "God was good to me. God is good. God was good at the cross." Ah, my knees buckle and I get on my face before him when I realize that God has been good to me by name. God has saved me by name. Not everyone experiences this grace. Not everyone receives Christ. God worked in my heart to insure that I was a recipient of his goodness and grace and so we think about it not as something out there that has happened 2,000 years ago, of course that's part of it, but that's not all. That's the point. We think about it and say, "Ah, he's been good to me personally."

What ever else is going on in your life, there should be a sense, a profound controlling sense if you're a Christian, "Wow, I am the personal recipient of unspeakable kindness from a gracious God." That's the only right way to think and that's what Paul's talking about: the kindness of God appeared by the washing of the Holy Spirit in your conversion. Do you know what that is? That's humbling. That's kind. God rescued you when you did not deserve it. Christ died for your soul when you didn't deserve it. The Holy Spirit applied that work of Christ to your heart when you didn't deserve it. There's almost, not quite, there's almost a sense in which you want to say, "God, stop because this is starting to be frightening because it's so alien to my experience in this world. It's so contrary to what I deserve. What manner of love, what kind of grace and goodness is this? And Lord, I'm so sorry that I take it for granted. I'm so sorry that I walk through with a grumpy spirit in life. How can I be that way? Lord, I'm sorry. I can't take it

anymore. It's too much. It's too rich. It's too wonderful. I can't take it all in." But do you know what? We're not done, we're not done talking about the manifestation of the goodness of God because there's more to come.

Said at the cross, at your conversion, number 3: at the consummation. The consummation of all things. You and I as Christians have only begun to see the goodness and kindness of God. We've only begun. We're like two pages into a 10,000 volume story. We've only begun to see the goodness of God on display. For you and I who are true Christians, the best is yet to come. Paul alludes to that in the passage from chapter 2. Go back to chapter 2, verse 11 with me. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men," meaning that it's been manifested to all manner of men, Jews and Gentiles, male and female. This is a Gospel available to everyone. He says in verse 13, remember he said the grace of God has appeared, he says in verse 13 we're looking for something that hasn't come yet. We're "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." It's not always going to be like it is right now, beloved. To be here as Christians is magnificent. As I've said many, many times and I'll probably say many, many more times, to be a Christian in this world is the most noble thing in the world. There is nothing more noble, more glorious than being a Christian. Nothing. Nothing. And yet with the riches of the grace that have been bestowed upon us, there's still more yet to come that we haven't yet entered into, that we don't yet fully possess. Paul here in Titus 2 describes it as "the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." He's going to intervene in human history. We are going to see him. 1 John 3:2 says, in fact we're going to see him face-to-face.

The more I think about that, seeing Christ face-to-face, that's the moment I'm living for. There's nothing else I want. To see my Savior face-to-face is going to be the culmination of the eternal plan of God for my life and for yours if you're a Christian. We are going to look into the physical eyes of Christ. We're going to see him face-to-face. It's no longer going to be by faith. It's going to be by sight then. I don't know, I can't begin, I've tried to imagine how majestically great that's going to be and I don't know. I mean, how can a sinful fallen mind contemplate what being perfected in glory with Christ is going to be. What's it going to be like to look into the eternal face of the Son of God? And as it were he says, "Yes, for you I died also." And to be able to be there in his presence and thank him. You know, I picture my sense of that moment and this is to diminish it far too much, but I think about seeing that and, you know, if I could do that when that moment comes, when that moment comes, I can go off into a corner of heaven and if nothing else happened, if I had just seen the face of Christ, I could sit in a corner of heaven and say, "Wow, it finally came true. I saw him. I saw him. I thanked him." And if that was all that heaven was like forever, just being in the realm of the thought that finally the consummation came place, that would be enough. But do you know what? That's not what God has for us. He doesn't have for us sitting us off in a corner remembering for all eternity one particular moment in time when we saw our Savior face-to-face. It would be great if he did. It would consume our thoughts forever but that's not it. That's not it.

Look over at the book of Ephesians chapter 2. "Face-to-face with Christ my Savior. Face-to-face, what will it be?" the hymn writer said. Oh beloved, out with our unworthy

thoughts of God. Out with our unworthy thoughts of his kindness. Out with our questions about his goodness. Out with our accusations of unfairness. Out with it all. We can't think unworthy thoughts. We can't accuse God of unkindness or a lack of wisdom in light of this goodness that has been manifested to us. We can't. That would be morally wrong. That would be reprehensible. We must think the highest thoughts about his goodness and strive to think even more highly of him than we do. Ephesians chapter 2, in a similar passage to Titus chapter 3, verse 3, Paul said, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins, formerly walked according to this world," verse 2. Verse 3, "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh," verse 3 there. This passage has a lot of similarities and thought to Titus 3:3 but Paul is going to take the manifestation to the future in what we're about to read. Ephesians chapter 2, verse 4. Has God shown us his kindness? Yes, he has. Is he done? No, he's not. "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," there's what Paul was talking about, Titus 3:5, the washing of the Holy Spirit. He made us alive together with Christ, watch this, "(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," here's the purpose of it all. Are you looking at verse 7? "So that in the ages to come He might show," he might manifest, he might display, "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Whatever else heaven is like, whatever else the blessed eternal state is like, it is going to be us watching God display his kindness to us for ages upon ages of ages. Throughout all of eternity, those of us who are in Christ are going to be the witnesses and somehow the participants in the display of the kindness of God. What we have now at the cross was perfect. The fact that he saved our souls by the work of the Holy Spirit is perfect and yet it's all aiming towards something so far greater, so far beyond this life that Paul says that in the ages to come, in the endless unfolding of eternity, we're going to be seeing the kindness of God toward his people on display. I don't know what that's going to be like. I can't fathom it but I know how wondrous it is that Christ died at the cross. I know how wondrous and powerful and miraculous it was that he woke me out of my slumbering death and I project that and say it's going to be infinitely, exponentially, by orders of the incalculable magnitude greater in the ages to come. And somehow, somehow you and I are going to be in the presence of Christ seeing him face-to-face. We're going to be overwhelmed, worshiping, joyful, grateful as somehow God expands even further in his display of kindness towards us in the ages to come. Endless display of the kindness that is like that, consistent with, the kindness that converted you, the kindness that took Christ to the cross. That's what's ahead for us. Stated differently, God's not done displaying his kindness towards us. From a temporal sense you could say he's just barely begun. We'll join together with the saints through the ages and throughout all of eternity we're going to be astonished at the kindness of God upon us.

That leads into another question that the passage raises for us. God has manifested his kindness at the cross, at our conversion and will manifest it at the consummation. Now, I hope that this context that the Scriptures gives to us for what we're about to say will forever banish from your mind any concept that you deserved this. We, beloved, don't deserve that and I don't have to speak in harsh condemning language about your sin and mine to say that. How can the creature receive such vast kindness from the hand of his

Creator? We don't deserve that, right? We don't deserve that and so the question is this, oh, this is beautiful, it's beautiful because it's Scripture. The question is this: how, track with me here, I really want you to get this, how did we come to receive such incredible, unspeakable kindness from the hands of God? How did we enter into that realm? How did we get through the doorway and enter into that realm of kindness? Point number 2 this morning: the motivation for his kindness. The motivation for his kindness. We've seen the manifestation of his kindness. What's the motivation for that? Why is God displaying his kindness like that to his people?

Paul answers that question from two contrasting perspectives and we're going to stop halfway through verse 5. "He saved us." He saved us out of that Titus 3:3 condition. "He saved us." What I'm about to read is where it actually starts. This is the emphasis of what we're about to see, "not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness," not that, "but according to his mercy." Not on the basis of deeds which you have done in righteousness. Beloved, it should be evident to you, it should be so obvious to you in what we have just said about the manifestation of his kindness. Just walk through it mentally in your mind as you think about this. You say, "I didn't deserve, I couldn't even ask the eternal Son of God to go to the cross for me. I wasn't even alive then. I didn't deserve that. I didn't deserve the sovereign work of the Spirit of God in my heart to convert me. I certainly don't deserve to spend eternity seeing the unfolding manifestation of the kindness of God. I don't deserve that." There's a sense in which, Paul, when you understand this, there's a sense in which if you're thinking rightly about the manifestation of the kindness, that this answers the question about our deeds before you even get into it. But Paul makes the point because we are so prone to pride and self-congratulation that that weed has to be pulled up by the roots out of our heart and it's hard to do. I have no confidence whatsoever that what I'm about to say is going to remove spiritual pride from your heart. I can't get in there. The Spirit of God has to do it. I don't have power to do it.

Do you ever go into a garden and you see a really big, thick weed and you try to pull it up and it just snaps at the ground at the root and you know that it's going to come back? Well beloved, you should be asking God to open your mind and help you with what we're about to see. Human words can't get into that spiritual pride and take away the sense, that little corner of your mind that says, "Yeah, but I'm just a little bit better than the person next to me. I'm just a little bit better than," name your comparison. The whole point of what Paul is saying here is designed to dig that root of pride out of your heart so that you would stop thinking that way, so that you would stop secretly congratulating yourself that you were somehow a little bit smarter than the person who isn't saved that, "I saw it. I made my choice and he didn't and, therefore, me over him." To think that somehow your life before Christ somehow deserved God showing grace to you. No. This decimates our pride, what we're about to see.

What motivated God's kindness toward us? Why was God good to us? First of all, it was not by works. It was not by works. Look at verse 5 with me again. The future trajectory of your spiritual life depends on embracing what we're talking about right here. Whether you're a Christian depends upon whether you actively affirm this and gladly state it. Paul says it's "not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness." It's not. It's not.

Beloved, I want to speak. I get animated about this and I want to be gentle as I say this to you but you've got to understand this. You have to. God did not give salvation to you because you deserved it. You were foolish and disobedient. You did not do any moral good to prompt God to show this level of favor to you. The fact that your parents may have baptized you while an infant did nothing but get you wet. The fact that you may have tried to be a good boy or a good girl when you were little had nothing to do with prompting God to be gracious to you. The religious ceremonies that you went through in systems of false religion, they didn't do anything to prompt God to be good to you. Nothing that you and I could have done could ever have prompted a holy God to show that great magnitude, that great manifestation of kindness to us. There is nothing that we could have done.

Beloved, not only speaking in the subjunctive, there's nothing we could have done, there is nothing that we did. God didn't give you, those of you that come from other religious traditions, God didn't show this kind of kindness to you because under the prompting of the 15th verse of "Just As I Am," you walked an aisle toward the front and came down to what they said was the altar. Please! What a perverted view of salvation to think that, "I took a few steps and I prayed the words that they told me to pray and in response to that God was finally good to me." No! No! No! Stop! Don't think that way! Nothing you did deserved this kind of kindness from God. Nothing. We are the undeserving recipients of unmerited, unlimited favor and grace from the hand of God. Look at what it says. Look at it with me again on verse 5. He could not have stated this more plainly. Verse 5, "He saved us, not," he negates it all, "not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness." Let me just say it from one other perspective: God didn't show you this grace because you avoided certain sins. I thought that for a while. I thought that was the proof of my salvation was that I hadn't sinned in particular ways. No. That has nothing to do with it. I might not have sinned in areas 1, 2 and 3 but I had sinned in areas 4-10,000. You see, you're so tempted, you're so conditioned that we're all like this. We're all cut from the same cloth. We're so tempted to think that we did something, that there was something in us that distinguished us so that we received salvation and someone else didn't. Beloved, that is not true. We've got to stop thinking that way. We've got to stop harboring those secret thoughts deep in that little secret chamber of pride in our hearts. It's not on the basis of anything that you did. You and I are not entitled to this kind of kindness. So it couldn't be from anything that you did. Protestant, Jew, Catholic, Hindu, Muslim, praying in certain directions toward Mecca. None of that does anything to prompt God to show favor to anyone. Not a drop of it. Scripture emphasizes this so much. God doesn't weigh out your life and say, "Oh, the good outweighs the bad by a little bit. Okay, I'll give you the riches of this salvation. 51%. I'll pass you on the curve." You know, when you talk about this in the context of the great manifestation of the kindness of God, all of that thinking is really despicable, isn't it? It's just so distasteful to even think about it.

Look over at Galatians 2. Wow, look at the time. Galatians 2:16. Scripture makes this so plain in so many areas and we're just looking at one or two. Paul says, "Knowing that 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," there is the utter negation again, "not by the works of the Law since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified." No one is going to be declared righteous in the presence of God by anything that they've done. Zero. There won't be one standing in that line. Ephesians 2:9, you know it, "Not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Here's the thing, beloved, it's not by works. It's not by righteous deeds that we have done that we have come to experience this kindness of God. That decimates our pride. A nuclear bomb has gone off in our hearts in response to this and obliterated any sense of self-congratulation, any sense of deserving, watch this, any sense of entitlement. We have no entitlement to this at all other than the fact that our champion, the Lord Jesus Christ, went to the cross in order to purchase it for us. It wasn't because of us.

So where did it come from? Go back to Titus 3 and we'll close with this even though I've got a little more in my notes. Titus 3:5, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but," another contrast, "but according to," because of, "His mercy." His mercy. Why are you a Christian this morning? One reason. One and no others. If you're a Christian this morning, it's because God had compassion on your soul. God showed pity to you in your miserable condition and said, "I will deliver you out of that, out of the sense of compassion and pity that I have in my heart toward you." Beloved, salvation finds its source in the mercy of God, not in the deserving of man. You are saved not because there was something about you, you are saved only because in the mercy of God it pleased him to do that and he made his kindness displayed toward you. It's based on the righteousness of Christ that finds its source in a gracious and merciful God, not a worthy individual.

Do you see it? You see, we have to think deeply about these things. We have to come to grips with it so that it would have the spiritual impact on our present Christian lives that God intends it to have. Why is it that Paul said, "Be gracious and peaceable with all men"? Why is it? Where do we find our motivation to do that? It's because we can't look on them with contempt as if we were somehow better. We can't do that because we're in this privileged position not by anything that we've done but by the sole mercy of God. This transforms everything. We are the recipients of such inexpressible undeserved kindness if we're Christians but our hearts should be profoundly humbled and just profoundly thankful.

If you're not a Christian here today, I beg you to come to Christ. I don't want this salvation to be just for me and my friends here alone. I want it to belong to you too. God is a reconciling God. He is a kind and gracious, merciful God and through the proclamation of his word, he's been calling you to come to Christ, not to present to Christ something that he would reward you for but to appeal to him to show that same mercy to you. "Lord Jesus, be merciful to me, a sinner." That's the prayer.

Bow with me in prayer.

Lord Jesus, you provided the way for salvation. You secured our salvation in your righteousness and in your substitutionary death on the cross. Our Father, you sent the Spirit to apply that work to our heart and he did and you're going to display even greater

degrees of that quality of kindness to us throughout all of eternity. We're so grateful, God. We're so thankful. We're so overwhelmed at all of the manifestations of your goodness and we can't even comprehend the fact that there's more yet to come. If we had this only in this life, we would have so much to be thankful for and yet this is just the initial appetizer, the full banquet of being at your table is yet to come.

Father, we can't fully grasp how deeply rooted the sin of pride is in our hearts and we know that there are things and we have blind spots that we cannot even see. We ask you to forgive us and cleanse us of those things and root them out even more. But in response to your word today, we simply want to affirm corporately that our salvation came from your mercy, not from our works. Father, we do not bow in pride at the altar of our superiority to someone else. No Father, we bow in humility at the foot of the cross and with those things in mind, Father, we offer you our worship in Jesus' name. Amen.

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