

Sermon Notes
Titus 3:3-7
GCF North
December 5, 2021
Christmas in 3 words

“O you better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout I’m telling you why...Santa Claus is coming to town!”

- A. Are we really interested in what Santa thinks about us? Is that what Christmas is all about?
- B. We think of many things at Christmas – parties, cookies, gifts etc..
- C. Yet for the people of God, we ought to think deeply and carefully about Christmas.
- D. Even more, we ought to think deeply and carefully about our God at Christmas.

Let’s think about God this morning. As you think about him, what comes into your mind?

- A. Perhaps he feels distant to you. Maybe God might seem demanding, even harsh.
- B. I wonder if some of you think God has not made up his mind about you and is simply tolerating you.
- C. In our text here in Titus 3, the Apostle Paul tells us what he is thinking about God. And with that, he also tells us the very point of Christmas.
- D. Paul tells us in just three words. These three words are not just the centerpiece of this passage. These three words are the summary of the gospel, the whole message of the Bible, the message of salvation and the purpose of Christmas.
- E. When Paul thinks about God, what comes to his mind? He saved us! (V5)

This language of saving or being saved we are familiar with.

- A. You forget your book with your study notes and borrow from a friend. (“you really saved me”)
- B. Baseball reliever: he “saves” the game.
- C. You are reminded it is your anniversary. (“you saved the night”)
- D. At some level, we understand the concept of being saved.
- E. When Paul says “He (God) saved us,” what does he mean?
- F. Does God get us out of a tight spot? Does he save us from ourselves? Other people?
- G. Perhaps the most important question is why? Why does God save us in the first place?

Paul’s answer to that we read in V3. (READ)

- A. This is a very unflattering, dismal view of humanity isn’t it?
- B. If this is true, all humanity is in a perilous condition because our relationship with God is a colossal mess.

- C. Paul is not using hyperbole or exaggeration for effect in V3. What Paul is saying here in V3 is that you and I were actually guilty of these sins, of living this way.
- D. It doesn't mean we committed every last sin on this list or that we committed every possible sin.
- E. This is who we once were, this was all of us, in our natural state, left to ourselves.
- F. We (the people of God) were once foolish – the word here means “warped.” We were warped spiritually.
- G. The apostle John says we actually loved darkness rather than light. (John 3:19)
- H. Paul says in Romans 1:21 that we became twisted in our minds and disordered in our emotions.
- I. Martin Luther commented on this verse by saying human beings have “curved in on ourselves.”
- J. We were slaves to various passions and desires and pleasures. And when you reject God, you cannot help but be enslaved to whatever your passions and desires are.
- K. Rejecting God and living for yourself will always lead to spiritual bondage that leads to spiritual death.

Because our relationship with God was a mess, our relationship with others was also a mess.
(V3)

- A. One of the more visible expressions of godlessness is not the way we treat God. It's the terrible way we treat our fellow human beings.
- B. Ex: playground, business, government...
- C. People really do hate each other. Paul emphasizes this by using two different words for hate in V3. (“hate upon hate”)
- D. Literally: we are “full of hate “which causes us to hate each other.
- E. This is the culmination of our foolish lives – we actually loathe each other because no one is able to give us what we really want – honor, esteem, worship.
- F. In your natural state, at the core of your being, the real you wants those around you to worship you.
- G. You'll hate me because I'm not committed to worshipping you. I'm far more committed to worshipping me. This is who we all once were.

This is heavy. Perhaps you are thinking “I picked the wrong Sunday to show up to church.”

- A. What is Paul up to?
- B. There is a hidden grace here in V3. It is actually helpful and necessary for the people of God to remember/rehearse who we once were for two reasons.
- C. First, it fuels our gratitude toward God. How can we not pause and give thanks to God for his spiritual blessings? He saved us!
- D. Apart from his divine rescue, our life verse was V3. We were born into it.
- E. So let's not live in a pretend, make-believe world where we try to project our best version of ourselves and manage our image.
- F. Only when we remember the depths of our depravity will we marvel at God's grace.

- G. Only when we come to grips with just how far we once were from God will we rejoice in how close he has come to us in Jesus Christ.
- H. Your heart will not treasure the grace of the gospel until you come to terms with the guilt of all your sins.
- I. Charles Spurgeon: “Too many think lightly of sin, and therefore think lightly of the Savior. He who has stood before his God, convicted and condemned, with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him and to live to the honor of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed.”
- J. Second, this helps us understand non-Christians much better. Why would we expect a non-Christian to behave differently than the nature they have?
- K. Doesn't mean non-Christians cannot be kind or generous or nice. But that does not change their heart or their nature.
- L. Niceness is not the same as being found in a right relationship with God. So we extend much grace and patience and compassion to those living apart from him.

If our text ended here in V3, we would be left with a frightening reality. We would be the most miserable people on the planet.

- A. We know the truth about ourselves yet we cannot save ourselves. No other person is going to save us either because they are just like us, according to V3.
- B. But the gospel changes everything! This is who we once were but not who we now are.
- C. Right after this dark description of humanity, God bursts onto the scene. (READ V4)
- D. The kindness and love of God had always been there – it is who God is – but there was a moment when the kindness and love of God broke through human history.
- E. And that moment was in the birth of Jesus in a manger, that first Christmas day.
- F. Jesus is the kindness and love of God made visible, in human flesh.
- G. Would any of us honestly say this morning that when we think about God, what first comes to our mind is his goodness to us, his lovingkindness for us?
- H. When does God's goodness and lovingkindness show up? When you and I were at our worst!
- I. He did not wait for us to get cleaned up or to figure a way out of the mess of our sins. God saw the ugliest, deepest, most grotesque, self-righteous parts of us. And he saved us!
- J. When we were at our worst, his love came to us. This is the good news of the gospel! And this is the good news of Christmas.

Paul can hardly contain his excitement at the work of his God.

- A. Verses 4-7 is one long sentence in the original Greek. You get the sense Paul is bubbling over with joy and profound thanks. (READ V4-7)
- B. The good news for us is that Jesus is not in V3 and you and I are not in V4-7. We do all the sinning in V3 and Jesus does all the saving in V4-7.

- C. So we have no reason to boast. "He saved" is the main verb in this rich and deep theological sentence.
- D. Paul makes clear that our salvation is due to God's actions, not ours.
- E. That is why V5 is the bullseye of the gospel. The heart of the gospel. You add or subtract from this in any way and you no longer have the truth of the gospel.
- F. He saved us....but not because of anything good in us or because of our potential for good.
- G. How might you finish this sentence..... "God accepts me because....."
- H. If you think you are saved and accepted by God because of something you have done or will do, then you are not really saved.
- I. True saving faith involves stripping away every last shred of confidence in anything except for God. Faith itself is a gift from God.
- J. If you think that God accepts you because you are inherently good, please re-read V3 and let that sink in.

He saved us (V5-6) "not because of works done by us in righteousness but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior."

- A. When God saves us, we must be re-born. We must be given new spiritual life, our hearts must be made new.
- B. There is no salvation without this rebirth and renewal. Unless we become new people with new hearts and new desires and new loves, we would never turn to God. Unless the Spirit works in us, we would not naturally desire eternal life with God.
- C. You must be born again. (not repaired or refined – regenerated)
- D. If you have put your faith in Christ, what was true about you in V3 is no longer true about you. In Christ, V4-7 describe you now.

He saved us (V7) so that "being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

- A. We are justified by his grace. Justification is a legal declaration, it speaks of being made right with a holy God. On account of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, sinners are declared righteous.
- B. We are given the very perfections and righteousness of Christ, credited to us, to our account.
- C. Example: bank statement....
- D. When God justifies you, the very goodness and righteousness of Christ are deposited in your account. You can't earn them. You can't buy them. It's God's grace. And Christ takes our sins upon him – in his account.
- E. Our legal status as sinners is forever wiped away.
- F. No matter how serious a student you are, you will never be justified by your good grades. (same with parenting or career or preaching)

- G. If left to ourselves, V3, we will get what we deserve and have earned – death.
- H. In V7, we get what Jesus deserves. We get his reward. We get God, eternal life with God. He saved us! Our God still saves people today!
- I. If you don't know this great salvation in Christ, then your reality is V3 and you are still dead in your sins but not without hope. Turn to Christ today.
- J. If you are a Christian, perhaps your daily walk with Jesus has become a bit ho-hum, even blah. Maybe a spiritual malaise has set in.
- K. Take a deep breath of gospel air. It's good for your soul.
- L. Let's remember who we once were and rejoice in who we now are, in Christ.
- M. We are who we are in Christ because he saved us!