

# DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE?

TITUS 3:4-8 JUNE 20, 2018

Titus chapter 3, verses 4 through 8 is our text this evening. Here we have the last of five Faithful Sayings, given by Paul to Titus and Timothy, his sons in the faith. As we've gone through these trustworthy principles, we've found that some have been pithy, some of have been poetic, some more proverb-like in structure. But tonight's is a little different. It doesn't quite roll off the tongue as a few of the others did. Rather, it's one of those long, run-on sentences that Paul liked to use.

The faithful saying is found in verses 4 through 7, and there Paul will talk at *length* and in *detail* about what Christ has done for us and who we are as a result.

Earlier this year, Marvel's *Black Panther* hit the theaters. One of the recurring phrases in the movie was "show them who you are." It's most prominent during an early battle between T'challa, who is the Black Panther and king of Wakanda, and a man named M'baku, a neighboring chief who challenges the throne. When T'challa falters in the fight, his mother shouts out loudly from the sidelines, "show him who you are!" The rightful king then overcomes his challenger, showing him mercy, but maintaining his position of power.

Disney's *Moana* had a similar theme running through the songs and story. From the outset, Moana is trying to reconcile *who she is* with her duty as leader of her people. At one point her grandmother sings to her: *Moana, you've come so far. Moana, listen, do you know who you are?*

Later, in a song where Moana discovers her heritage and calling is to be a voyager across the seas, the lyrics say these lines: *We sail the length of the seas...we set a course to find a brand new island everywhere we roam, we know who we are.*

In the climax of the film, Moana confronts a dangerous monster, but rather than destroy her, Moana sings: *this does not define you, this is not who you are, you know who you are.*

In each case, the idea of knowing *who you really are* is what determined the course ahead and what enabled the characters to rise up above failures and foes and lay hold of their destinies.

As Christians, *we know* who we are in Christ. And yet, we're reminded again and again in the New Testament about this very thing. Who are we in Christ? What has the work of Jesus accomplished for us? Certainly, Titus was no stranger to the truths Paul was writing to him, but it was necessary for him (and for us) to hear these truths again.

The Apostle Peter explained it this way in his second letter:

**2 Peter 1:12 - I will always remind you about these things—even though you already know them and are standing firm in the truth you have been taught.**

So Paul reminds us once more about who we really are because of Jesus Christ and then gives a prescription of how we should then live *in* that reality. We begin in verse 4.

**Titus 3:4 - <sup>4</sup>But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,**

The verse opens up with the word “but”, which follows a long list of who we *were* apart from Christ’s intervention. We were hate filled, envious fools who acted more like animals than men. We were slaves to sin and in hostility toward each other. Now, some of those who do not believe in Christ yet live what we might call ‘moral’ lives may protest and think, “That’s not who *I* am.” But, your relative goodness is just like throwing a coat of paint over a moldy wall. The contamination may be hidden for a short period, but the problem still exists, whether it’s outwardly visible or not.

It’s good for us to take a look at what sin really is. It’s advertised as pleasure, but in reality it’s prison. We were enslaved to wickedness and headed for an eternity in hell. Not a *few* people, but *all* of us.

But then, Jesus came! Paul describes Him here as the embodiment of God’s kindness and love. This is a warmhearted compassion. God came as a *Rescuer*, willing to save anyone and everyone who would call on His name. Paul goes on, saying that Jesus appeared...

**Titus 3:5a - <sup>5</sup> not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us,**

Mankind did not *discover* salvation. We didn’t uncover a hidden treasure in some deep, dark jungle that bought us out of sin and death. No, salvation *appeared* to us, though we would not and could not find it on our own. It was *revealed* and then offered as a free gift.

The Apostle specifically says that it has nothing to do with our works or our actions. Salvation, God’s favor, God’s grace, is never a payout or some merit system. He’s not giving out special badges for those who learn to make spiritual fire on their own. It’s important to keep this truth in mind because, and the end of our text, we’re going to be commanded to *maintain* works. We’ll see the *why* and *how* when we get there, but here at the start Paul could not be more clear: Salvation is not by human works. It is according to God’s *mercy* that He saved us. The Lord had pity and compassion on human beings, who (quite frankly) aren’t all that lovable. Elsewhere the Bible explains that none of us are righteous, we have all turned aside, we were corporately and personally at war with God, and yet He loved us with a tender, saving love.

**Ephesians 2:4-5a - <sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses**

Salvation is the work of God. Here Paul dives down *into* that work, describing and detailing it for us.

**Titus 3:5b - through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,**

We’re given two items here: *regeneration* and *renewal*. To be regenerated means to be refashioned. To start over. The old sin nature is crucified with Christ and we are born again.

But then additionally Paul says that we’re renewed. We’re not *just* starting fresh, because what good is it to start over if we’re not transformed? We’d just end up in the same place again. But being renewed by the Spirit indicates that we are made *better* than before, new *and* improved. Now we have the Holy Spirit of God indwelling us and continually transforming us by His power.

The Holy Spirit, whom (verse 6:)

**Titus 3:6 - <sup>6</sup> ...He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior**

God has poured out His Holy Spirit on us without restraint. The image is one of flowing out in a torrent in fullness of experience. It's like those scenes in movies about drilling for oil where they finally hit the supply and all of a sudden a huge geyser shoots out from the ground high into the air, showering all over everything and the oil men dance around in celebration. James Dean did it. Jimmy Stewart. Daniel Day Lewis didn't *dance*, but he was happy. That's the kind of abundance we're talking about, but notice the arrangement: We don't have to go digging for this Spirit, it was the Lord who poured Him out on us. He doesn't have to be coaxed or cajoled to come around. He's poured out on us *abundantly*. Not rationed in some tightfisted way, but in over-ample generosity.

Verse 6 causes us to consider the fact that, to the Apostle Paul, being a Christian meant being a *Spirit-filled* Christian. There weren't some believers who were interacting with and being renewed by the Holy Ghost and others who were not. To be a Christian meant to be Spirit-filled. To quench the Spirit wasn't given as an *option*, but a grave *error*. The Christian life isn't simply accepting some information about God intellectually. The Christian life is to be *born again*. Regenerated and renewed. To have a living relationship with the Trinity, Who we see all at work in this text.

Being in relationship with God is not just knowing a spiritual math equation. "I believe mentally and that's all God wants." Well that's not the end of things. As James wrote, "Even the demons believe." But *our* faith is activated and produces what the Bible calls spiritual fruit. Jesus said quite plainly that this is the plan, that we bear fruit. We bear fruit by being renewed by the Holy Spirit. And, as Paul wrote in Galatians:

**Galatians 5:25 - <sup>25</sup> If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.** (emphasis added)

Verse 7 continues:

**Titus 3:7 - <sup>7</sup> that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**

Justified means the case is closed. We have been set free because God has declared us to be righteous by the blood of Jesus Christ. Again we note that this was not done because of any works or worthiness on our part. It was an act of mercy and *grace*. Grace acted in a way we do not deserve so that we might become heirs with Christ.

Sometimes when a young person receives an inheritance, it's held in trust until they reach a certain age. They can't get their hands on it until they're 18 or 21 or whatever is stipulated. But the New Testament points out that this isn't how our heavenly inheritance is. Yes, there are parts that are being saved until *after* we graduate to heaven. But *other* aspects can be cashed in right now. One scholar put it this way: *Salvation may be future, but it also extends into the present.*<sup>1</sup>

What portions of our inheritance are extended to us now? Peace, joy, empowerment, the banishing of fear, the removal of guilt, ongoing renewal and filling by the Holy Spirit, just to name a few. We are heirs of Christ and we can draw upon that inheritance right now.

**Titus 3:8a - <sup>8</sup> This is a faithful saying...**

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<sup>1</sup> Theological Dictionary of the New Testament pg 1135

Verses 4 through 7 are an important, trustworthy reality. If you are a Christian, *this is who you are!* These things are true about you! This letter has been preserved and delivered so that you can have confidence in these things and so that you might know how to walk in this reality.

Paul concludes by giving us some directives in *how* to walk in this truth.

**Titus 3:8b - and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.**

Affirm and maintain. To affirm means to insist upon, to speak confidently about, to assert this truth. We do so through preaching to ourselves and to others. By holding fast the confession of our faith. By actually talking about spiritual things. Paul says to affirm *constantly*. Meaning that it's to be a regular pattern in our lives. That we keep revisiting the idea of who we are because of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we do a mental exercise that goes like this: "If you knew you had one week to live, what would you do differently?" The idea is that knowing our destiny was certain and specific would impact our lives. We would make changes and choices according to that reality. The same is true here. This is a faithful saying - a truth you can hang the weight of your life upon. This is your reality and that should impact your changes and choices as you live your life. Paul said to Titus back in chapter 1 that he wanted him to set things in order according to all this heavenly truth that had been revealed. Affirm them. And then be careful to *maintain* good works.

We don't need to be skittish of this verse because Paul has already (very clearly) said that human efforts don't *get* you saved and they don't *keep* you saved. But, a real, living faith *will* produce good works like a healthy tree produces fruit. It's natural, it's expected.

Since we believe in who Christ is and what He has done, then we should act upon that reality, not only as a *response* to His grace, but because this is who we are. It's our function in life to be bearing fruit. We are new creations sent out to minister in God's power.

'Careful' here in verse 8 means to direct our attention and to be intent upon maintaining these good works. To maintain means to practice and engage in these things. So, paraphrased, Paul is saying, "be intent on practicing good, spiritual work as you are led by Jesus Christ and filled with the Spirit."

What are the practical, shoe-leather works that Paul is talking about? Well, this particular letter is *full* of them. He has real world examples for men, for women, for young, for old, for workers, for church members. And that's just in Titus. But above the specific directives, there are also *general* principles for us in *how* we are to pursue 'good works.' First of all, Paul says in chapter 3, verse 14, that we as Christians have to *learn* how to maintain good works. It's a process. We're all called to growth and development. We may not have all the understanding yet, but we'll have more as we exercise our faith. Second, Paul tells us in chapter 3 verse 1 that we need to be *ready* for good work. A lot of the Christian life is just about being sensitive to when God is leading us. Third, Paul tells us to be *zealous* for good works. That's in chapter 2, verse 14. It's not a checklist. It's that our hearts understand what God has done and who He has made us to be and we get on board with that and with His plan for ministry and cultivate that spiritual fruit in our lives. Fourth, Paul tells us in chapter 2 verse 7 that good works should be a *pattern* in our lives. Christianity isn't meant to be a *component* of our lives, it is the focus. It's who we are. Fifth, Paul says in chapter 3 verse 14 that we pursue good works that we might not be unfruitful. After all, God is a fruit farmer!

All of this lines up well with what Paul wrote earlier in Ephesians chapter 2.

**Ephesians 2:10 - <sup>10</sup>For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

These things are profitable for us and for the wider world as mercy goes out, the Gospel is spread, people are drawn to Jesus Christ, they're exhorted, they're convicted, and along the way we are continually renewed by the work of Jesus and the power of the Spirit.

This last faithful saying is a deep well of truth. One we can be inspired by, but more importantly, one we need to drink from and return to again and again. This is who we are. Let's enjoy it and show it.