**Grace Goes To Work**

**Titus 2:11-15 (ESV)**

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We’re going to be reading from Titus, today. The theme of our series here is *Order in a World of Chaos*. Since we’ve started the series, it seems like the chaos is just advancing and growing and growing in our world. There is chaos in Europe which could lead to chaos all over the world. It’s a serious moment in the history of the world. That chaos, you’re not immune to on a very personal level. I don’t know of anyone that I’ve talked to that hasn’t had some kind of really deep chaos in family and amongst really close friends. Isn’t it good to know that the Gospel offers us order? It offers us a place of peace, a place of harmony. That’s the promise. Even now in a world of chaos, the Gospel breaks in. We’re going to read about that this morning.

***11*** *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,* ***12*** *training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,* ***13*** *waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,* ***14*** *who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.* ***15*** *Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.*

May God encourage us through His Word, today!

What a special moment every time we open up the Word together. It’s special because the Word is special and because the promise potential is really great for transformation. So we’re going to start by praying and asking that we would receive the power of God’s Word in our soul in a way that we would benefit by life.

A couple of weeks ago I was having Buddy Time with my 4 year old grandson. We went to our place, which is the Original Pancake House. That morning, I was talking to Malakai about being shy. When Malakai is around people that he doesn’t know very well, he will physically turn his head away because he finds some comfort in that. It’s a little off-putting or nervous to be in front of somebody, so here is his safety zone. He turns his face away and he finds some comfort in that. I was trying to coax him away from this shyness by telling him that God gave him a special heart and that God can use him to show God’s love to other people. If he turns away from them, however, he’s going to keep himself from being a person who communicates the love of God and he may even communicate the opposite to the person.

Well, I was getting nowhere on that subject, (Laughter!) so I switched gears and I asked him if he still has bad dreams. He shared that he sometimes does. Then, he paused and he said, “But I can’t be shy of my bad dreams.” That’s a very interesting thing to say. I don’t know what he means by that, so I asked him more. I asked, what do you mean? He said, “I have bad dreams and I try to be shy of them, but I can’t. I wish I could be shy of them, but I can’t.”Intrigued, I asked him to tell me more. Malakai said, “When I have a bad dream at night, I turn my face away from my bad dream. But my dreams are in my head so when I turn my head, my dreams go with me. (Laughter!) I can’t be shy of my bad dreams.” This was a strategy that is effective with strange people because he can find comfort in turning away and then he can almost feel like they’re not even there. But when the dream is inside of his head, he can’t be shy of them. It’s not a strategy that works. They’re still there.

Malakai’s story reminds me of the hope that God gives to us in Titus 2 today. Remember that Paul has instructed Titus to appoint elders in every church in every town. Paul taught that Titus is to appoint elders who are qualified to be men who have given evidence of significant life transformation, who have grown toward Christlikeness.

**Titus 1:7-8** For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

Then in chapter 2, God continues to explain that these character qualities that are to be evident in elders’ lives are really for every Christ-follower. They are to be character qualities pursued with faith and zeal.

**Titus 2:2-3** Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine.

**Titus 2:4-5** the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands,

**Titus 2:6-8** Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned,

**Titus 2:9-10** Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith,

God is painting for us a portrait of the kind of life every Christ-follower is to live so that we would adorn the Gospel, that we would show that this Gospel that God has used to save us is a Gospel that is worth believing. It’s a Gospel that is beautiful. It’s a Gospel that is life-giving. The way we live communicates something about the Gospel and its well-pleasing nature. This lifestyle that we have just read being described is very different from the lifestyle we see lived in the world around us. This life of the believer is alien. It’s foreign to this world. It’s alien in its behavior. It’s alien in its speech. It’s alien in its relationships, its thinking, its values. Every part of the life of the Christ follower is different from the life of those in this world.

From these passages in Titus 1 and 2, we learn what kind of life God calls us to live. We have a great description. It’s a great portrait. But so far, we have not been told how we can live this kind of life. How can we overcome the obstacles that stand in our way, to live the kind of life described? We know that sin still pulls upon our hearts. While we are freed from the bondage of sin, the principle of sin is still active in our lives. We know that this world continues to squeeze us so that we would conform to its behaviors, values and thinking. We feel that squeeze and we know that there is an enemy of God called Satan, the devil, who works actively to tempt us to rebel against the God who saved us.

So how can we live holy lives that adorn the Gospel of God our Savior? Here’s the problem. I would like to simply be shy of sin. I would love for it to be as simple as me turning my head away from sin in some physical act. I would love for it to be as simple as if I just do that, the sin problem that I experience every day would be completely removed. But I can’t be shy of sin. I can’t because the temptation to sin is in my head. I turn my head physically away from sin, and there it is. It turns with me. I need more than my own efforts if I am to grow in godliness.

The main idea we’re going to trace in Titus 2:11-15 is that God’s grace works to forgive us and to empower us. Pay special attention to the last part. It’s to empower us. The answer to the sin problem, simply put, is the grace of God. In your bulletins, you have a wonderful outline that Pastor Josh prepared for you because he was planning to preach today until Friday, when he became ill. So rather than using Josh’s outline, I’m giving you one of my own. His is more brilliant, but this one is more pertaining to the way I think. So I’m going to share with you five workings of God’s grace. I’ll state them and then walk through them.

God’s grace is at work. How so? God’s grace has appeared. God’s grace trains us. God’s grace awaits us. There is something of God’s grace in the future that helps us even now. God’s grace redeems us. It changes us and gives us a new identity. God’s grace authorizes us. So let’s look at the first.

**God’s Grace Has Appeared**

***11*** *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,*

That word “appeared” means that God’s grace became visible to our eyes. The word “appeared” refers to an unveiling of something that had been previously covered or hidden from sight. It’slike when a famous artist paints a mural to symbolize the significance of a city. The artist then in painting, doesn’t let anyone see it, but he describes it to reporters who then write articles about what the mural is going to look like when it’s finally unveiled. But no one sees it. So people have words to think about the mural and its beauty, but there is no physical display of its beauty. Then finally, when the mural is completed, there is a day when the city plans this great big celebration. Citizens gather together and at the climax of this event, the covering of the mural drops and there is the big reveal. If it’s a magnificent mural, everybody is going to “ooh and ahh” and look with wonder upon this much awaited masterpiece.

That’s the idea here. The grace of God appears. The cover drops and we can see it now visibly. So when did the grace of God appear? It says it has appeared; past tense. When did that happen? The answer of course is when Jesus entered the world. It’s when the eternal Son of God took on human flesh. When Jesus walked this earth for 33 years, living a completely sinless life and fulfilling all the righteousness of God in every aspect, the grace of God has appeared. When Jesus then dies upon the cross as a sacrifice for sin, bearing our sin upon His own body so that He might bring us to God, the grace of God has appeared. Then when Jesus is lying in the grave and the third day rises in power and glory and demonstrates Himself in power and glory to be the Messiah who has accomplished the necessary work of bringing forgiveness of sin, the grace of God has appeared. Then on that day when Jesus talks to the followers in Jerusalem and He says, “I’m leaving here and you’ll be my witnesses when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,” He ascends into heaven and everybody is gazing at the sky marveling at this visual appearance of the grace of God and the visible ascension into heaven. The angel is there saying, “Why do you stand looking here? This same Jesus is going to return.” So the grace of God that has appeared is going to reappear at a future day. Hold onto that. But for now, do the work of the kingdom. Go out and be witnesses, for the grace of God has appeared.

Here’s the truth we want to follow in this. The grace of God is an eternal attribute of God. In other words, in the coming of Jesus, it’s not as though the grace of God had a birth in the birth of Jesus. It didn’t have a beginning in the birth of Jesus. The grace of God has been eternal because it’s part of God’s very person. It’s a quality of God Himself. God’s grace has always been, but in Jesus, the grace of God appears. This is a marvelous thing for us to consider, living in this present age after the grace of God appears to us.

I love the story that Luke tells us about Simeon. Simeon had read in the Old Testament about the grace of God. He read the grace of God prophesied, the grace of God explained, the grace of God demonstrated. But he knew that there was a promise that the grace of God would appear in visible form in the coming of a Messiah. He is a righteous man and He’s waiting for this grace of God to appear. So it’s revealed by the Holy Spirit that he is not going to die before the grace of God becomes visible. So one day, he enters the temple and he is in the Holy Spirit. He’s ready to worship. Jesus’ parents bring in Jesus and as soon as Simeon sees this little one, he takes up Jesus in his arms and he blesses God. This is what he says.

**Luke 2:29** “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,

Now I can die happy!

**Luke 2:29-30** …according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation

Do you catch that? It’s that same enthusiasm we have today. Our eyes have seen the grace of God. It’s not just prophesied in the future. It’s not just explained. It’s not just described. It has appeared in visible form so that we can enjoy the grace of God. What a treasure that the grace of God has appeared!

Let me ask you, do you ever wonder if God is gracious to you? Do you ever wonder that? I know it’s a common spiritual battle. “I know God’s grace is out there, but is God gracious to me?” What do we do when we ask that question and when we have that kind of doubt? What I say is look to Jesus. Fix your gaze upon Him. Fix your gaze upon Christ as a mom gazes upon the face of her newborn baby. How does a mom do that? She does it with intensity, with detail, with focus. She doesn’t want to take her eyes off of this little precious one’s face. She notices every little curl in the hair. She notices every feature and she just marvels. That’s what faith does. If you ever wonder, “Is God gracious to me?” here’s what you do. You go to Christ and you begin to gaze upon Him. Gaze upon His Person. Gaze upon His worth. Gaze upon His accomplishments. Gaze upon His promises. Gaze upon Christ and don’t let your eyes shift from Him. Don’t become distracted by the pains of this world nor by its pleasures.

I think of Peter in the boat. He sees the grace of God appearing on the water in power and glory. He hears the voice of Christ calling him to come on out. He steps out. His eyes are fixed. Then what happens? The grace of God lifts him up. It keeps him above the water. He walks out to Christ. But then what happens? The winds and the waves begin to take his attention and he takes his eyes off of the grace of God. It’s possible to begin with the grace of God, but then take our eyes off Him. Then what happens? We suffer for it. We wonder, “Is God gracious? What’s happening? I’m sinking!” So the answer is always to fix our eyes upon Christ.

***11*** *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,*

Here’s what John says.

**John 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

**John 1:16** For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

Beloved, I want you to know that from the fullness of Jesus Christ, if you are in Christ, you have all received His fullness of grace. How full is it? It’s grace upon grace. There is no limit to the supply. It’s like one wave of grace rolling over your soul after another wave of grace. That’s all in Christ. If we’re not experiencing that, it’s not because the supply has run low. It’s because our eyes are no longer fixed upon Christ and we’re distracted by the things of this world, whether the pains and trials and temptations and difficulties, or the pleasures of this life. There is grace upon grace.

**John 1:17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

I love that! As we look upon Jesus, we will see the grace of God lavishly flowing in its strength to the healing of our soul and it brings salvation for all people. There is no person who is beyond the reach of God’s saving grace. It brings salvation to all people. You’re in that “all people.” I would ask you, have you received the grace of God that brings salvation? Have you received the forgiveness of God, the justification of God, the adoption into God’s family? All of that grace, we don’t earn it. We haven’t deserved that. But in Christ Jesus, the grace of God has appeared and it’s an offer of salvation to all people. I would ask you, have you personally received the grace of God that brings you into the blessings that Christ offers? Once we are there, the call here in this passage in Titus 2 is let’s stay there. Let’s not leave there, this grace of God. Let’s not avert our eyes from the appearing of the grace of God in our salvation.

When I was at Moody Bible Institute as a student, there was a professor there, Donald Hustadt, who was a great church musician. He was a really renowned church music historian. He wrote books about hymns. I had heard of him. I didn’t really know him. One day I got on the elevator with him and he engaged conversation with me. I was kind of a shy student. He engaged conversation with me and he said, “Where are you from?” I said I’m from Peoria, Illinois. He said, “Peoria, Illinois! What church do you attend?” I told him I go to Grace Presbyterian Church. “Grace Presbyterian Church!” He had this joyful, happy heart about it. Right after he said “Grace Presbyterian Church,” he said, “Julia Johnston.” Then it got kind of quiet because I didn’t know who Julia Johnston was. (Laughter!) Who is she? He said, “Julia Johnston wrote *Grace That Is Greater Than All* *My Sin*.” Okay. I’ve heard of that hymn. I know that hymn well. It’s one of my favorites. He said, “She was a member of Grace Presbyterian Church.” I didn’t know that.

Now, she was gone long before I ever attended Grace. She was in heaven. But that story has locked that song into my heart. It was already there because it had ministered to me, but that story. I thought, here I am in this church that God has used before I came, where there were faithful people proclaiming the Gospel. Out of that church and discipleship, there was a woman that wrote a song that ministers to my soul today. That’s pretty remarkable! That’s how God’s grace works when we fix our eyes upon Jesus. We’re able to minister the grace to others. Here are some of the words of Julia Johnston’s song.

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,  
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!

Whatever your sin, whatever your guilt is, grace exceeds it. Then she says

Yonder on Calvary’s mount outpoured,  
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilled.

It’s a song that calls our attention to look yonder. Do you see it out there? Can you see the grace of God having appeared yonder on that hill?

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide;  
What can avail to wash it away?  
Look! There is flowing a crimson tide,  
Brighter than snow you may be today.

Look! The grace of God has appeared. Look in order to benefit from it.

Grace, grace, God’s grace,  
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;

We need that, don’t we?

**God’s Grace Trains Us**

***12*** *training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,*

This word “training” is an interesting one. The word here is not so much teaching or instruction in a formal setting like a classroom. The Greek word is paideuo. I say that because we get an English word from it that helps connect the meaning. Paideuo means train, and we get the word “pediatrician” from it. What does a pediatrician do? He attends to little ones, children. This is the kind of training that parents give to their little ones as they’re growing. So they’re one, two, three, four, five years old and they’re growing. Parents are teaching them a wisdom about life, teaching them what’s right, teaching them what’s wrong. It is this word that is being used of what God’s grace does to us. In other words, it’s not, “Okay. I got the lesson, closed the book, took the test and it’s done.” It’s a grace that is constantly active like a parent is constantly active in every kind of circumstance, training in every relationship, in every temptation, in every sphere, training us to say no.

***12*** *training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,*

When we believe in Jesus, God imparts new life and from that moment on, we’re like little ones, newborn babies, small children, growing and learning toward Christlikeness. What helps us to grow? It’s grace. God’s grace takes us by the hand and in love, teaches us two really important life practices. I love that little word because there is such love and affection. There is such security behind this kind of training. It’s not the kind of training the Law gives, that says, “You better do this or else.” It’s the kind of training that parents give that says, “I’m here for you in all of your feebleness and all of your failings. I’m going to even use your failings to do more training and I’m never going to let you go. I’m going to keep after you to the completion of maturity.” That’s what grace does.

There are two important practical lessons. One is negative and one is positive. First, it teaches us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. There are a lot of things to say “No” to. It teaches us also to live self-controlled upright and godly lives in the present age. What God is teaching us is that the grace of Christ will change the way we live. No one experiences the grace of Christ and says, “Now I have fire insurance, but it hasn’t really affected my life in any other way.” That’s not how the grace of God works. If that’s how you think the grace of God works for you, I’m going to tell you it doesn’t. No one has fire insurance without also transformation, without new life. So this salvation that is offered is whole. It does provide us with protection from condemnation, from eternal destruction in hell. But it also changes our life now so that we’re no longer enslaved to sin and now we’re children of God and we’re living out the delight of being in the family, living lives for the glory of our Father who loves us and cares for us so.

Every believer is right to ask this question: What is radically unique about my life because Jesus is in it? If you would raise your hand and say, “I am a believer in Jesus Christ,” I want you to ask this question for yourself. What is radically unique about my life? Look at all the people around you. Look even at some really good people around you in the world who don’t have Jesus. I’m telling you, when the grace of God appears and comes to bring salvation into your life, something unique, something radically different happens in your heart. If we cannot answer that question, it’s possible that one of the things that is happening is that Jesus is not truly in our life.

I want you to notice the difference between grace and law for a moment. It is the grace of God that transforms us, that sanctifies us. It’s not the law of God. Now, the law of God is good. You’ll never hear me speaking ill of the law of God. It is perfect. It is an expression that helps us understand who God is and what God demands. We would be in great error as believers to discard God’s law and set it aside, paying no attention to it. But the law of God will not train us in how to live godly lives. The law of God will not teach us to renounce worldliness. Only the grace of God can do that. God’s grace, not God’s law, possesses the power to grow us in godliness.

Now here, some of the legalists, perhaps some even here this morning may begin to have trouble. They may begin to be concerned. The legalist who has a passion for righteousness says, “How will, for instance, church members learn to behave themselves if we don’t hammer the law into their skulls with constant repetition and follow it up with severe punishment when the Law is broken? How can we expect to have any other outcome other than a sinning church if we don’t have the Law central?” They think that God’s teaching about grace and not the Law will make the community less holy and more worldly. Beloved, there is nothing that could be more damaging or wrong-headed to the church than this.

I want you to think of two people that symbolize one, the Law, and the other, grace. John talked about this when he introduces Jesus as being full of grace and truth. The person that symbolizes the Law is Moses. He is the one who received the Law from God on Mount Sinai. Then we have Jesus who came and we beheld His glory, the glory that was full of grace and truth. The Law came through Moses, but grace comes through Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you, if you had an opportunity to sit down with one of those two people to ask, “How can I live a godly life in this world today?” who would you go to? If you were able to say, “Would you help me with that? Would you devote your life to helping me with that?” who would you go to? Would you trust Moses or would you trust Jesus? I’m telling you, you would be in grave error to trust Moses with that issue. Now, Moses is good. He can do a lot for us. He can lead us to the Messiah. But we need Jesus if we’re going to overcome all these sinful passions of this world, all these sins that roll through our heart. We need Jesus because there is grace.

I love the *Pilgrim’s Progress* for so many reasons. There is a part of the story that is my favorite. It always strikes me whenever I read it. Christian goes to Interpreter’s house. Interpreter is opening up the Bible and teaching Christian about the Christian life. Interpreter takes Christian into a really big room in the house called the parlor. They enter the house, they open the door, and it is just filled with dust. There are layers of dust and dirt all over the place. So then Interpreter calls in one of the young men of the house and the young man has a broom. This young man begins to sweep while they’re in the room. What happens when this young man begins to sweep all this dust that is in the room? You can expect what happens. There is just a cloud of dust that rises up and chokes the room. It’s not really cleaning anything out. It’s all staying in the room. Now it’s in the air and people are coughing. Then Interpreter calls a little girl. A young girl comes and she has a pail of water. She pours the water out on the hardwood floor and that dust all catches and solidifies and then when they’re able to sweep, they’re able to clean the floor.

Christian says, “What does this mean?” Interpreter says the young man with the broom is the Law. This parlor describes our heart. It’s full of dust and dirt and flesh and selfishness, pride, sin. If we took the Law to our heart, yes, it would expose a lot more sin. Once the Law enters in, it shows how dirty the heart really is. But it doesn’t do any cleansing. It has no power to affect change. The young girl represents the grace of the Holy Spirit. When the grace of the Holy Spirit comes and sprinkles the room of our hearts with water, then there can be cleansing. Interpreter says this. “So is sin vanquished and subdued, and the soul made clean through the faith of it, and, consequently, fit for the King of Glory to inhabit.” Beloved, God’s grace doesn’t starve us from practical holiness. God’s grace feeds practical holiness.

I love this little couplet. “Do this and live the Law commands, but gives us neither feet nor hands. A better word the Gospel brings, it bids us fly and gives us wings.” I love that! The Law tells us, do this and you’ll live. That’s true. If we did it, we would live. But it doesn’t give us any help with our feet and hands to actually accomplish it. A better word the Gospel brings. It bids us fly, take off. Rise up to heaven and worship! Then the Gospel gives us wings. It gives us the ability to actually do it. That’s his point here. The gospel of grace trains us.

Let me ask you, how are you doing with saying “No” to worldly passions? Let’s think about that for a moment. This is the application for our life. Think over the last week of your life. How are you at saying “No” to worldly passions? What are some of those? I think of pornography. We think of substances like alcohol and other drugs. We think of material stuff that excites us. I think of anger. That’s a worldly passion when we become really mad. We think of bitterness. “Someone hurt me. Someone wronged me and I’m just rolling in my heart with it.” We think of vainglory. “Here’s where I’m going. Here’s where I’m headed. Here’s what I want to make my life.” How are you doing at renouncing those things?

For some Christ followers, their life is week after week uninterrupted, of failure. So often with failure, with an attempt to actually make a change, it feels like it’s never going to happen and it’s almost out of reach. I want to encourage you that the grace of God in Christ is 100% efficacious. Can I say that again? The grace of God in Christ is 100% efficacious. What do I mean by that? It always works. If the grace of God hits your heart and your soul, it will train you to renounce worldliness and ungodly passions. It will. So if what your experience is that that’s not true, the reason for that is not that the grace of God didn’t work. The reason for that is that your heart is not receiving the grace of God. In other words, there is something that is standing in the way, some obstacle. Seek the Lord on that and ask Him “What obstacle is keeping me from receiving the grace of God so that I could exhibit this life that renounces worldly passions and that lives out godliness and self-control and Christlike living?” How are you doing?

The application that I would urge you toward is keep your gaze upon Jesus Christ. Commune with Him. Use the means of grace by which you can connect to Christ, but do not rely upon the means of grace. Rely upon Jesus only. What do I mean by that? Many of you have been in church long enough to know that one of the healthy practices of the Christian life is to read your Bible. But do you know that reading your Bible may not do anything good for your soul? Do you know that? It’s because of how your heart receives it.

The Bible is not to be an end of itself. The Bible is a means by which we get to Christ. How do I know who Christ is and how do I know what Christ is saying to me? Well, God says, “I’ve given you a book. Look to Christ in it.” Don’t read the book so you can say, “I’m a good Christian. I checked this off today.” That’s the Law. That’s relying upon your spiritual discipline. I rely on Christ. I’m using this book to get to Christ, to get myself set before Him at His feet, kneeling. Teach me! Instruct me! What have you done for me that I need to apply to my life today? What promise do you have? What direction? What calling would you give?

It’s the same with prayer. Why do we use prayer? It’s not so we can say, “I’m a man or woman who is strong in prayer.” We pray to say, “Lord, I need to connect with Jesus. You tell me that there is a means by which I can talk to you and prayer is that means.” There is also the communion of the saints. You say, “I went to church today. I had an hour less of sleep, but I still went to church.” First of all, I commend you. But coming to church is for a means. It’s saying “When I’m with other Christ followers, we help each other focus our attention upon Christ and then we gather toward Christ together.” That’s why the communion of the saints is so powerful. It’s because the grace of God has appeared in Christ and the grace of God trains us. If we get ourselves connected to the grace which is Christ, then our lives begin to change for His glory. Then we become worshipers.

**God’s Grace Awaits Us**

I love verse 13!

***13*** *waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*

Christ followers live in the past, the present and the future. We live in the past because we keep looking back to the grace of God having appeared in Jesus, in His birth, His perfect life, His cross, His resurrection, His ascension, all of these things. We live in the past. We never let ourselves leave the past. We stay there. But we also live in the present because what happened in the past affects us now. In this present age, in the midst of a world that is still filled with sin, God says we can worship Him now. We don’t have to wait for a future day to worship Him. So we live in the present, saying no to ungodliness and worldly passions and saying yes to righteousness and holiness and godly living.

Then we also live in the future. How so? We’re waiting for that future day to arrive. Paul calls that future day our blessed hope. I love that word! The word “blessed” means happy. The word “hope” means this eager expectation. It’s not sort of wishful thinking, but it’s an expectation of certainty based on something God promised absolutely will happen and it’s a happy thing. What is that happy thing? What is that blessed hope? It’s the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. So Jesus appeared the first time in grace and His glory was largely hidden. He will appear a second time in grace, but His glory will be seen throughout the whole world. He will come in righteousness and power on that second day.

We know that the world is not the way it’s supposed to be and that it will not be the way it’s supposed to be all the way until this future day. But when Jesus appears that second time in power and glory, He is going to take everything that is wrong and He is going to make it right. Every illness, every disease, He is going to bring a cure. Every conflict, whether on a personal level in families or on a national level in the world, He is going to bring peace and prosperity and goodness. He is going to switch everything up so that what His rule and His power establishes is something that we can say, that’s going to be a happy day. That’s going to be a happy, happy day! I can’t wait for it to happen!

Furthermore, this body of sin that we’re carrying about, for us who are living in this age, when that day happens we’ll be transformed. We’re going to have a body that is free of sin. We’re going to live an existence where we’re not even tempted by sin, let alone fail in it. Is that a blessed hope to look for? Paul says yes and it’s vital in our worship of God in the work of God’s grace to think about that future day and to long for it. He says we wait for it. It’s not even a command here to wait for the blessed hope, as it is just sort of an expectation that this is what Christ followers do. This is who we are. We’re a people who are waiting for the happiness of a future day when Jesus appears in glory.

Now, it’s my belief that everybody is waiting for something that they believe will make them happy. Everybody, believer and unbeliever, every person is waiting for something that they believe will make them happy. Here’s the question. What are you waiting for? It’s kind of an active waiting. It’s not a passive waiting. People who are waiting for something to happen are active about it. They think about it a lot. They try to pursue it. It’s an active kind of waiting. What are you and I waiting for?

In the world, there are a lot of options. Some are waiting for a significant other to arrive. When that happens, then life will be really life. Some are waiting for a baby to be born. Some are waiting for a baby to grow up and get out of the house. (Laughter!) There is counseling over here afterwards. (Laughter!) Some are waiting for graduation. “I can finally start doing what I want to do.” Some are waiting for a promotion. Some are waiting for retirement. What are you waiting for? If you’re a believer in Jesus Christ, here is the answer of a healthy soul, a soul that is resting in growing grace. I’m waiting for Jesus to return. I think about it. I long for it. I talk about it. I’m waiting for it. It’s going to be great! Right now, Jesus is with me and He’s going to sustain me. So I don’t have to be in despair, even though this present age is hard. But I’m waiting for this future day. It’s going to happen and it’s going to be amazing!

In this season of the pandemic, I’ve heard a little phrase that I’ve heard some say.“I can’t wait until we get back to normal.” Have you ever said that or heard that? “I can’t wait until we get back to normal.” Now, here’s the deal. First, there is some loveliness to being over a pandemic, granted. But if you think back, normal wasn’t that great. (Laughter!) I mean, can we get a testimony about this? It wasn’t like we were living in utopia. We were living in a world filled with troubles. Why would we say, “I can’t wait to get back to normal because then there is happiness and there is joy”? Why would we as believers want that? Why don’t we say, “I can’t wait until Jesus returns”? That is something worth waiting for. It’s worth counting on. Well, the last couple parts of our consideration will be very short.

**God’s Grace Redeems Us**

We have a whole new identity because of God’s grace.

***14*** *who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*

Three words describe our new identity in Christ, here. We kind of have them on the poster in the back of us. This is who we are now. We’re redeemed. What does that mean? Well, we used to be slaves to sin and now we’re redeemed. We’re bought out of slavery. We’re no longer a slave to sin. We’re no longer a slave to the fear that sin brings or the condemnation that sin brings, the shame and the guilt. We’re no longer slaves to any of that. But we are children of God. How blessed we are to be loved by God as our Father now and forever and ever. We are redeemed. We are redeemed with the highest price that God could pay, and that was with the blood of His precious Son. Jesus Christ gave His very self so that we could be purchased out of this terrible condition that our sin brought us into and that we could be God’s children. We are redeemed.

Then he says that God’s purpose is to purify for himself a people for His own possession. It is to purify us so that we would be a treasured possession of God Himself, sung over, delighted in, a purified people. We have been justified, declared righteous. We are being sanctified. God is purifying us by the love of Christ as He washes us with the water of the Word, Ephesians 5 says. We one day will be glorified. One day, this purification will be absolutely complete, but right now we are in Christ’s hands. As the husband of the bride, He is purifying us.

**Ephesians 5:25-27** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

That is who we are. That’s how precious we are. We are being purified.

Then we are zealous for good works. That’s who we are. We’re a zealous people. Grace makes us zealous. In reference to good deeds, the Law can obligate us. “Well, I should do this. It’s what good people do and I want to be a good person, so I should do it.” The Law can coerce us. “Well, I have to do this because there are going to be bad consequences if I don’t participate in these good works.” It is grace that makes us zealous. What is zealous? It means enthusiastic. What are we enthusiastic about?

It’s March Madness. Some folks are really enthusiastic about the games that are coming ahead in college. Whatever you’re enthusiastic about, if you are a follower of Christ, the grace of God will make us infinitely more zealous for being part of God’s kingdom and advancing His name through His church in this world, being a witness for Christ, than anything else that excites us. We are a people zealous. That means we’re after it and we talk about it. We are zealous for good works. What an amazing thing God’s grace is!

My grandson said, “I can’t be shy of my bad dreams. I wish I could, but I can’t. When I turn my head, my bad dreams are still in my head.” It’s kind of a hopeless condition, isn’t it? But the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men. It’s not unto us to turn our head to be free of this mess of sin and selfishness and condemnation and destruction of soul and destruction of relationship. Jesus Christ says, “Abide in me and you will bear much fruit. Commune with me. Abide in me. I am with you and I am for you. If you are in me, who could stand against you?”