

Text: Titus 3:1-8¹

Title: Part 5 -- Jesus, Born to Save

Series: Paul's Christmas Gospel

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Do you ever find yourself thinking on Boxing Day, "So what now?" The carols have been sung, the gifts have been opened, the meals have been cooked and consumed and so, now what? After all the focus on the celebration of Christmas, do you ever catch yourself wondering about what next?

Paul's Christmas Gospel doesn't end with the celebration of the birth of Jesus. The Christmas Gospel is a message that propels us "towards what's next."

This morning we come to the final example of Paul's Christmas Gospel. Here it is. I'm reading from Titus, chapter 3, verses 3 to 8:

³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, 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, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ⁸ The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

Just so that you don't miss the Christmas Gospel, here it is again...

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us..." Titus 3:4-5

The key Christmas word is the word "appeared." In his birth, his life and his ministry on earth Jesus made God's grace visible. Looking into Jesus' face we see God's saving grace.

On Christmas Day I was watching few minutes of the movie, *The Nativity Story*, and I found myself moved to tears during the scene in which the shepherds come to the stable to see the baby Jesus. I was imagining what it must have been like

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on that night for those people to look into the face of God ... the wonder of God's grace in human form. And as the angel told Joseph...

**“you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”
Matthew 1:21**

From what did he save us? In his letter to the Romans Paul tells us that...

“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.” Romans 5:8-9

By his sinless life and his atoning death on the cross...

Jesus saved us from God's wrath.

But Jesus death didn't only save us *from* God's wrath. He also saved us *for* something. God has saved us for a purpose and here it is...

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:8-10

Jesus saved us for God's work.

That is the “what next” of the Christmas Gospel and it is Paul's focus in his letter to Titus. Christmas doesn't end with the unwrapping of the gift of God's grace in Jesus. Christmas continues as we put God's grace into action in our lives. It's like wearing that new sweater or tie or earrings you got for Christmas. We've been given the gift of God's grace in Jesus and the “what's next” is to live in that grace.

Paul tells us that we have been saved from God's wrath in order to engage in God's work. Paul wrote to Titus...

“The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.” Titus 3:8

Most people want to be good. But how? The common conception about doing good is that we begin with believing good about ourselves. But that's not the teaching of the Bible. The Bible teaches that ...

Doing good starts with believing good ... about God, not about ourselves!

For ten years I was a part of a group of people from the church that led a monthly chapel service out at Bowden Institution. Several years ago I was talking with one of the men after our service – we always spent time talking and praying with the inmates around a cup of coffee after a time in worship together.

I'm going to call this man "Bill." I had known "Bill" for some time, but on this night we had the chance to talk about where we had come from. He mentioned that he was from "back east." "Where exactly," I asked. "Toronto," he said. Knowing that he had been a churchgoer before his conviction, I asked him if he had attended a church in Toronto. "Yes," he responded, and gave the name of the church. The church he mentioned was well known to me. It was a church that had been started by people from Ruth's home church, High Park Baptist Church. Ruth and I had attended High Park Baptist together after our marriage and so I mentioned my connection with High Park.

"Oh," Bill said, "would you know my aunt Sally² who attended there?"

You could have picked me up off the floor. Not only did I know Aunt Sally, but Aunt Sally had been in our home for supper several times. More than that, Bill's Aunt Sally, a single woman at High Park church, had been a close friend of Ruth's family and had been like an aunt to Ruth while she was growing up.

All of a sudden it hit me – Bill and I were related! Bill's upbringing and mine weren't all that different, and yet Bill was a convict in Bowden Prison and I was a preacher of the Gospel. All that separated Bill and I were some choices we'd made. A prisoner in the Tower of London, watching another prisoner on his way to execution, is alleged to have first uttered the line: "There but for the grace of God go I." That's exactly how I felt at that moment, standing there with Bill.

But I was related to Bill in another way. I, too, am a sinner. And like Bill, I'm a sinner saved by God's grace and mercy. And I am, in fact, Bill's brother, because by God's grace we have both been made members of God's family. And by God's grace, both Bill and I are living new lives. God has saved us both from God's wrath and for God's work.

A couple of years ago I was attending an orientation meeting for prison volunteers when the prison chaplain read a letter from a former inmate. He had written to thank the staff and volunteers for their influence in his life and he wanted us all to know that he was, well, "being good." It was Bill. God was at work in his life.

The Apostle Paul had a great sense of awe at his salvation. Whenever he began to preach the Gospel of salvation, he always seemed to make sure that his audience knew that he identified himself with "the sinners."

² Not her real name.

“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.” Titus 3:3

In other words, Paul said to Titus, “There but for the grace of God go I.” Paul’s list of sins seems pretty harsh! Many people today think of themselves as essentially good. They might say, “Well, I’m not as bad as ... so I guess I’m OK.”

Well, let’s take a closer look at this list.

First of all, Paul lists **sins that relate to our relationship with God.**

“Foolish” doesn’t mean stupid, it means spiritually blind. In Psalm 14:1 it says **“The fool has said in his heart, `There is no God.’” (NIV)** Have you ever doubted God’s existence? Do you know anyone who has? Then you’ve been at least a bit foolish.

“Disobedient” means rebellious against God’s direction of your life. Have you ever said to God, “I’ll do it my way, thanks”? If you have then, you’ve been disobedient.

“Led astray” means spiritually duped into thinking that there are other spiritual beings who deserve our worship other than the only true God. Have you ever thought that there are many ways to God other than through Jesus Christ? If you have then you’ve been deceived.

Second, Paul touched on **sins that relate to our own failures.**

“Slaves to various passions and pleasures.” Have you ever had a bad habit that you’ve found hard to break? Have you ever struggled with smoking, drinking, over-eating, pornography, shopping? Then you know what it’s like to be “enslaved.”

Third, Paul addresses **sins that involve our relationships with others.**

“Malice and envy.” Do you find yourself thinking badly of others? Are you frequently jealous of the accomplishments or possessions or gifts of others?

“Hated by others and hating” others. What about that Liberal Party of Canada, eh?

These things that Paul lists aren’t perhaps as far from us as we might think!

Christian writer, Max Lucado, puts our discovery of our own sin in this light.

“All of us occasionally do what is right. A few predominantly do what is right. But do any of us always do what is right? According to Paul we don’t. “There is none righteous, no, not one,” [he wrote, in Romans 3:10.]

Some may beg to differ. “I’m not perfect, Max, but I’m better than most folks. I’ve led a good life. I don’t break the rules. I don’t break hearts. I help people. I like people. Compared to others, I think I could say I’m a righteous person.”

I used to try that on my mother. She’d tell me that my room wasn’t clean, and I’d ask her to go with me to my brother’s room. His was always messier than mine. “See, my room is clean; just look at his.”

Never worked. She’d walk me down the hall to her room. When it came to tidy rooms, my mom was righteous. Her closet was just right. Her bed was just right. Her bathroom was just right. Compared to hers, my room was, well, just wrong. She would show me her room and say, “This is what I mean by clean.”

God does the same. He points to himself and says, “This is what I mean by righteous.” (2004, Preaching Today.com)

If we really want to be good people, the place to begin is NOT by believing that we are good, but in believing truth about the goodness of God. **First, if we really want to be good people...**

...it means unwrapping God’s good gift of His mercy

“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy” Titus 3:4-5

If we are as truly bad as Paul has just described, why would God even bother with us? Well, as a Christian writer long ago observed, **“in the Gospel, we discover that we are far worse off than we thought, and far more loved than we ever dreamed.”**

God’s Word tells us that the sin that Paul has described in verse 3 deserves punishment – in fact, it deserves the death penalty. **“The wages of sin is death,” (NIV)** Paul had written to the Romans. (Romans 6:23) But instead of giving us what we deserve, God wants to give us what we don’t deserve – mercy!

Notice the words of life and healing that Paul packs into this declaration to Titus: “goodness,” “loving kindness,” and “mercy.” That’s God’s heart attitude toward us!

“Loving kindness” is what God wants to show us. Yes, there is His judgment if we reject his kindness, but he wants us to experience kindness. “Loving

kindness” translates the word, philanthropia. It literally means, “love of mankind.” God loves us! And because he loves us, he wants to show us “mercy.”

“Mercy” is the attitude of someone who sees a need and reaches out to meet it. It’s the response we have when we see on TV the pictures of children that need sponsors or when we read the mail we receive from Compassion Canada inviting us to care for a child in need. God sees us flailing around in our foolishness, our enslavement and our hate and his heart is moved for us.

Paul speaks of God’s “goodness,” “loving kindness” and “mercy” appearing – when did it “appear”? In a stable in Bethlehem. On the dusty roads of Palestine. On a cross just outside Jerusalem. It appeared in Jesus. Jesus was the expression of all these things. Jesus was God reaching down to touch us with kindness and mercy.

God’s kindness and mercy touched us in Jesus. He didn’t just “feel a feeling” for us. His loving kindness and mercy moved him to action for us.

Some years ago, Ruth experienced a prolonged illness. Several people in the church made meals for our family as beautiful expression of kindness. One week, Jennie Moffat was making us supper and when Andy came to drop it off at the house, he was carrying the meal and a wrapped package. He told Ruth that Jake had picked out this gift for her and wrapped it himself. Then Andy told us the story.

Jennie was making supper for us and Jake noticed that there were a few extra preparations than usual. So he asked why. Jennie told him that she making supper for us because Mrs. Reilly wasn’t feeling well.

Jake disappeared into his room and came back with this package, all wrapped up. “Here,” he said to Andy and Jennie, “Mrs. Reilly can have this until she’s better.” Ruth took the package from Andy, opened it and inside was an Elmo stuffed toy that belonged to Jake. That’s “loving kindness”!

In his loving kindness and mercy God gave us his own Son. Instead of demanding that we take the punishment for our sin ourselves, God sent his beloved, only Son, Jesus Christ, to take it for us. 2000 years ago he died on a cross set in a hilltop just outside the city of Jerusalem to take our death penalty for us.

We’ve been saved from the consequences of our own actions – Jesus took them all for us. He took our wages – and all our overtime pay for that matter! You and I can’t do a thing to help, all we can do is receive his gift.

We're not good people, but we've been given a good gift, the gift of God's own Son who saves us from our sin by his death on the cross. Have you received his gift of mercy?

Secondly, if we want to be good people...

...it means unwrapping God's good gift of His Spirit

“he saved us, 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...” Titus 3:5-6

Through the death of Jesus on the cross, our sin has been wiped away. But God doesn't only want to take away our “badness,” he also wants to give us “goodness.”

The Bible tells us that in the same moment that the blood of Jesus washes away our sin and its guilt, the Holy Spirit of God comes sweeping into our lives to make us new inside and out.

Paul speaks of two actions of the Spirit – the washing of regeneration and the washing of renewing.

The “**washing of regeneration**” speaks of our entrance into the family of God. The word “regeneration” literally means “made again” and it's related to the expression “born again.”

“Regeneration” is what Paul described when he wrote...

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

“Regeneration” by the Spirit happens in an instant. God's Spirit accomplishes his work even faster than the spirits in Dickens' A Christmas Carol whose work changed old Scrooge's miserly heart all in one night. The moment we come to faith in Christ everything is new!

Secondly, Paul speaks of “the **washing of renewal**.” The Spirit applies the blood of Christ to our lives and washes us clean in an instant, and at the same moment he begins the life-long work of changing us from the inside out.

The word “renewal” is the same one Paul uses in Romans 12:2 where he instructs us to be...

“transformed by the renewal of your mind” Romans 12:2

The moment we come to faith in Jesus, the Spirit begins a work of changing the way we think so that our thoughts and desires line up with God thoughts and desires. We have been made children of God and the work of the Spirit is to remind us constantly of our new identity and to reshape us into children of God.

The best tool for renewing our minds that the Spirit has in his toolbox is the Bible. This book tells us who we are as God's children.

On May 28, 1972, the Duke of Windsor, the uncrowned King Edward VIII, died in Paris. On the same evening, a television program recounted the main events of his life. Viewers watched film footage in which the duke answered questions about his upbringing, his brief reign, and his eventual abdication.

Recalling his boyhood as Prince of Wales, he said: "My father [King George V] was a strict disciplinarian. Sometimes when I had done something wrong, he would admonish me, saying, 'My dear boy, you must always remember who you are.' "

John Stott, the British Bible teacher, heard this comment and made an analogy to God's work in our lives. He wrote...

It is my conviction that our heavenly Father says the same to us every day: "My dear child, you must always remember who you are." Let us constantly remind ourselves of who we are [in Christ.] © PreachingToday.com John Stott, The Message of Romans (InterVarsity); submitted by Owen Bourgaize, Guernsey, United Kingdom

That's what the Spirit does as we read the God's Word. He reminds us of who we are in Christ.

Third, if we want to be good people...

...it means unwrapping God's good gift of eternal life

"so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Titus 3:7

At Christmas we all "hope" to receive certain gifts. This week I was telling my son, Hudson, that when I was a child I remember regularly asking for a chemistry set for Christmas. In those days you could buy them from the department store Christmas catalogues. I can't imagine the liabilities that the stores incurred by selling them, and that may explain why you don't see them advertised today. I never got a chemistry set. I also remember asking for a BB gun and you all know what my mother said in response to that request ... "You'll shoot your eye out!" I never got a BB gun. We all have Christmas hopes that remain unfulfilled and probably always will.

Many of our Christmas hopes are “maybe” hopes. But this “hope” is not a maybe – its confident expectation! It’s based on the fact that we have been “justified by his grace.”

“Justified” means that we have been forgiven for our sin and that no guilt or crime stands against us. We stand before God our Judge as innocent men and women because we believe that Jesus died for us. That is a fact!

And God’s promise of eternal life is a fact that we can count on in the same way. God wants us to know that our future is secure with Him. Even though we encounter all kinds of difficulties here in life, heaven is our destiny! It’s God’s promise to us and He wants us to live in the security and confidence that that promise can give us. Our future is secure.

God has given us three wonderful gifts...

- The gift of his mercy – our past has been dealt with by His mercy.
- The gift of his Spirit – our present is empowered by His Spirit.
- The gift of eternal life – our future is secured by His promise.

So now what?

“The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.” Titus 3:8

Our past, present and future have all been secured by God’s goodness and grace. So now, God says to us, “your needs have been taken care of; now, care for others.”

As a response to our post-Christmas “what now” question, let me suggest something that sounds a little like a “New Year’s” resolution: **Find something good to do for others that expresses God’s mercy, kindness, love and grace and do it!**

- Making meals for those who are sick or distributing CDs to the shut ins
- Becoming a volunteer for Mustard Seed, Samaritan’s Purse or one of the service agencies in our community
- Become involved in a ministry of the church that communicates God’s grace and truth to others

Just find something to do for Jesus and do it.

As Bill Hybels, an American pastor & writer puts it, when we come to the end our lives, **“I would never want to reach out someday with a soft, uncaloused hand – a hand never dirtied by serving – and shake the nail-pierced hand of Jesus.”**

- **Invitation to Prayer**
- **Final Song:** In Christ Alone
- **Benediction**