

Message #1
Titus: Being the Church in a Hostile Culture

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THE PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF A COMMON FAITH TITUS 1:1-4

INTRODUCTION

Captain Jeffrey Little (PROJECTOR ON--- JEFFREY LITTLE) filed a lawsuit two weeks ago in federal court in southern California. He has served for 22 years as a lifeguard in Los Angeles County. Last year the Los Angeles County Board established a policy requiring all county facilities to fly a pride flag in the month of June. Jeffrey Little requested an exemption from that requirement asking that he not to be forced to put up a pride flag at his life guard station on the grounds that to do so would violate his deeply held Christian convictions.

His request was immediately met with pushback. He was removed from another county agency in which he served. His request was leaked to various county officials. He began to be harassed for his views. He and his two daughters received death threats. His district chief Fernando Boiteux told him, **“You are an LA County employee. That’s the only thing that matters. Your religious beliefs do not matter.”** (*Christian Post*, 5/31/2024) Such is the world in which we live.

At the same time we sense that the influence of Christianity on our culture is in decline. Last year two researchers published a book entitled *The Great Dechurching*. (THE GREAT DECHURCHING) The authors found that in recent years 40 million Americans, or 16% of the population of the US, have stopped going to church. The Gallup organization has been tracking church membership trends in the US for eight decades. Their researchers have found that for the first time there are more adults who do not attend church than who do. The change has been sudden. The pandemic contributed to this decline. But it is not the whole reason.

How are we Christians to live in this kind of environment? What is the role of the church? The little New Testament Book of Titus was written by the Apostle Paul to a church leader and his people who lived in a culture not all that different from our own. He wrote a similar message to Timothy in 1 and 2 Timothy. The three books were written about the same time and have come to be known as the Pastoral Epistles. They give pastoral advice to church leaders about how to be the church in a hostile culture. So we are going to undertake a study in the next few weeks of Titus to see what helpful things it may have to offer to help us to live more effectively in our world.

I. A.

(I. THE HISTORICAL SETTING) So we are going to begin by considering THE HISTORICAL SETTING of the book. We shall look at THE PLACE where Titus was living. (I. THE HISTORICAL SETTING A. THE PLACE--- CRETE) Titus was living on the island of Crete in the north side of the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. (CRETE) Crete is an island about 160 miles long by 38 miles wide. Leading up to the time of

Jesus it was part of the Greek empire. In 69 BC it was captured by Rome. The Cretans had fully embraced the Greek religion. They claimed that Crete was the birthplace of many of the Greek gods, including Zeus. According to Cretan legend Zeus was born in a cave on the island. Such is the eerie parallel with the Christian story.

The gospel apparently first reached Crete as a result of the Pentecost story. The disciples of Jesus had been told by their Lord to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them. According to Acts #2 these Christians were gathered together in a house in Jerusalem when a noise like a roaring wind came upon them. They began praising God in various languages. Jews from throughout the Roman Empire were gathered together in Jerusalem for this big religious feast, and they were shocked to hear these Christians speaking in their native languages. (ACTS 2:5-6A) We are told in Acts #2 vv. 5 & 6, **“Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together...”** Then in v. 11 we are told about the various people who were present (ACTS 2:11): **“...both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”** Peter proceeded to tell them about Jesus. There was a great response from the large crowd which gathered, and three thousand people were baptized. Some of them were probably from Crete, and these Jewish Christians would have returned to their homes on the island with the gospel. Thus the church was established on the island of Crete.

B.

Consider next THE RECIPIENT of this letter. He was TITUS. (I. THE HISTORICAL SETTING A. B. THE RECIPIENT) In v. 4 Paul calls him “my true child in a common faith.” It appears that Paul introduced him to Jesus. Last year we studied the Book of Galatians. We saw in our study then reference made to Titus. Paul was helping to get a largely Gentile church established in Antioch in Syria. It was fairly early in his ministry work. We read at the beginning of #2 in Galatians (GALATIANS 2:1): **“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. (GALATIANS 2:2) I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. (GALATIANS 2:3) But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. (GALATIANS 2:4) Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—”**

The Apostle Paul was meeting with the church leaders in Jerusalem, who were all Jewish. The Jewish leaders were trying to wrap their heads around the idea that Gentiles could become true followers of God without becoming Jewish. Titus was an example of a Gentile who had truly become right with God by simply believing in Jesus. So Paul points out to his Christian audience in Galatia that Titus was not forced to be circumcised.

Titus probably traveled with Paul on some of his later missionary journeys. Reference is made to him again in 2 Corinthians. Paul was sending this letter with Titus to the church at Corinth in Greece. We are told in 2 Corinthians #8 v. 23 (2 CORINTHIANS 8:23), **“As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.”** So obviously Titus is a trusted coworker.

It is some years after this when this letter is written to Titus. The thinking of most students of the New Testament is that after Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, he was let go. The Book of Acts ends when Paul is still a prisoner in Rome. Verse 5 in this first chapter in Titus says that Paul left Titus in Crete. So the most likely scenario is that after Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, he embarked on another missionary trip which brought him to the island of Crete. Titus was left there with directions to build up and strengthen the churches on that island. Sometime later he wrote this letter to Titus for the purpose of further encouragement of his assigned task.

C.

This brings us then to THE AUTHOR---PAUL. (I. THE HISTORICAL SETTING A. B. C. THE AUTHOR---PAUL) He describes himself in v. 1 as a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. Most of you know the basic story about him. He was a young Jewish guy from Asia Minor who studied in Jerusalem under the famous rabbi Gamaliel. He was a very committed and serious religious Jew who was involved in the persecution of the first Christians. He was sent on a mission by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem to arrest Jewish Christians in Damascus. On the way he had a dramatic encounter with Jesus. Jesus appeared to him in dramatic fashion. He told Paul to stop persecuting Christians and to start serving Him. He told Paul to start preaching about Jesus and to bring this good news to Gentiles. This was a double shock to Paul. Not only was he to start promoting Jesus, he was to start promoting Jesus to Gentiles. In his kosher religious training Gentiles had always been regarded as unclean. Good Jews were not to eat with Gentiles or even enter their homes. Now Paul was supposed to seek them out and tell them about Jesus.

The earlier background of Paul is not so well known. The guy who translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin was Jerome, who served in a monastery in Bethlehem around 400 AD. He says that Paul's parents came from Gischala in Galilee. (GISCHALA) Decades earlier this town had been a hotbed of resistance to Rome. The Romans captured it. Those not killed were taken off to other parts of the Roman Empire. Jerome says that Paul's parents were taken to Tarsus (TARSUS) in Asia Minor, what we know today as Turkey.

It is implied that they were taken as slaves to Tarsus. Typically they would be assigned to Roman families. Often after years of faithful service they would be freed. The usual practice was that they would take on the name of the Roman family which they had served. "Paulus" was a common Roman family name. At the time when freedom was given Roman citizenship was often also granted. Thus Paul would have inherited this citizenship status from his freed family. His name "Paul" would have been what is called

his “cognomen,” which was inherited from that Roman family which once owned Paul’s family. (PROJECTOR OFF)

This likely history of Paul’s family background would explain the uniquenesses of his resume. It was unusual for Jews outside of Judea to be fluent in Aramaic, the first language of the people of Judea. But if his parents came from Galilee, it would be understandable that Aramaic was the language that they continued to speak in their family. Also this religious origin in Galilee would explain the interest that the family would have in sending Paul to Jerusalem to study under a famous rabbi. It was unusual for Jews outside of Judea to do that. Growing up outside of Judea would also explain his familiarity with the Greek language. All of this would suit him well for the mission which God had for him.

In v. 1 Paul calls himself “a servant of God.” The actual word is *doulos*, which literally means “slave.” Given his likely family background, this term had a special and personal meaning to him. His family may well have known first-hand the meaning of slavery. Given his unique background and education Paul was well equipped to serve as an apostle, a special representative, of Jesus Christ.

II.

We come then to THE FOUNDATIONAL MESSAGE. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE FOUNDATIONAL MESSAGE) In v. 1 the apostle identifies the source of his authority. He has been sent by God. He is a representative of Jesus Christ. Titus knew Paul well. So he did not need an explanation about that. So it is obvious that Paul expected this letter to be read and seen by other Christians in addition to Titus.

So then we get into the content of the message. Paul speaks in v. 1 about the faith of God’s elect. Some translations have the term “chosen ones.” The stress here is placed on recognizing the source of salvation for us Christians. This is not just that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins. It is that God the Father was involved in picking us individually. That rubs some of us wrong. But the New Testament seems to stress this in a number of places. In Ephesians #1 vv. 3 & 4 (EPHESIANS 1:3-4A) Paul writes, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...”** This choosing happened before the world began.

Jesus Himself stressed the divine initiative in our salvation. He is recorded as saying in John #6 v. 44 (JOHN 6:44), **“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”** Such is the divine initiative in our salvation.

Some among us of a more skeptical bent might object that it is not fair. What if we are not among the elect? What if we are not among the chosen ones? Jesus in this same passage describes our responsibility and our opportunity. He says, according to John #6 v. 37 (JOHN 6:37), **“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever**

comes to me I will never cast out.” The offer and opportunity is there for anyone who wishes to come to Jesus. He will never cast us out if we come to Him in faith.

This faith system, according to our passage in Titus, is connected to knowledge of the truth. Jesus is the center of this belief system. According to John #14 v. 6 Jesus declared, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** Our world today is uncertain about the reality of absolutes and truth. For some the idea of truth is the narrative that people in positions of power use to keep their power. According to a survey conducted by Arizona Christian University in 2021 54% of American adults agree that “There are no moral absolutes.” In other words, there is no absolute right and wrong. Really? Do people actually believe that?

A Christian historian by the name of Glen Sunshine writes, **“...Christians asked the Romans to believe that their eternal destiny depended on putting their trust in a Jew (a member of an unpopular minority) living in Judea (widely considered the worst province in the Empire) who had been crucified as a rebel. This collided with not only ‘the offense of the cross’ and anti-Jewish bigotry, but the very thing that, for a culture that prided itself on its cosmopolitan, broad-minded outlook, was the unforgivable sin: the claim of exclusivity--- the claim that Christianity is true and everything that contradicts it is false. As in any society that makes tolerance its principal virtue, there were limits and Christianity’s claims of exclusivity clearly crossed them.”** (Glen Sunshine, *Why You Think the Way You Do*, p. 41) Does that sound like any society that you know? It’s OK for you Christians to believe in Jesus, but don’t tell us that He is the only way to God, and don’t condemn the rest of us just because we don’t believe the same things that you do.

This faith message, Paul continues in v. 1, should produce godliness. This is not just some intellectual idea that should produce philosophical agreement. It is a message, when it is embraced, should transform behavior. And it usually does. Who are the first people who usually show up at the site of natural disasters? Is it the American Humanist Society? Is it the American Atheists? Is it the Hindu Relief Society? No, it is Samaritan’s Purse and World Relief and Convoy of Hope and various Christian denominational groups.

In v. 2 Paul says that this message involves the hope of eternal life. Hope in our normal parlance is often wishful thinking. It involves a considerable lack of certainty. But in the New Testament hope is a confident expectation.

The object of this hope is eternal life. Eternal life has different aspects. The Apostle John identifies the present aspect in his first epistle in #5 v. 13. (1 JOHN 5:13) There he writes, **“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”** Eternal life is a present possession for those who have believed in Jesus.

But there is a future aspect of this eternal life. We cannot see perfectly what lies beyond the grave for us. This is where hope enters into the picture. The Bible promises us a

great life beyond the grave. Jesus told the criminal on the cross next to Him who expressed faith at the last moment that he would be with Him in Paradise.

The basis for this hope and these promises is a God who never lies. He always keeps His promises. This is in contrast to the culture in which the Christians lived in Crete. The people of Crete were known for their lying. There was a Greek word in use in these days which was *kretizo*. You can perhaps tell that it has as its root the name "Crete." The word meant "to lie." Such was the reputation of the people of Crete.

In our current election season we are faced with political leaders of all affiliations and stripes at all levels of government who are making lots of promises. Too often they are easily broken. These broken promises tend to make cynics of many of us. The assertion here is that God always keeps His promises. These promises, especially concerning eternal life, stretch far back into history, literally "before times eternal."

Events of this world may too often seem crazy and without purpose. Evil may seem out of control. But the claim of this message proclaimed by the Apostle Paul is that God is sovereign, and He is in ultimate control. There is hope. There is a promise of eternal life and salvation. This salvation reaches down to individual lives. It is part of a plan which began before times eternal. In 2 Timothy #1 v. 9 Paul spoke of "**...[God] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began...**" Such is the debt we have to the God who has reached out to us.

In v. 3 of our passage Paul speaks of the message which was "**...at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior...**" In the Gospel of John #1 the Apostle John spoke of this word, this *logos*. He says that this word was manifested in the appearance of the Son of God in humanity.

In our study of Galatians we saw that this manifestation happened at just the right time in history. The Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians #4 vv. 4 & 5 (GALATIANS 4:4-5), "**But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.**" Jesus was the full manifestation of this word described in our passage. But the primary focus in our passage appears to be the preaching of Paul about Jesus.

The preaching of this message was the result of the command of God. Paul did not originally have a life goal of preaching about Jesus. He was a persecutor of Christians. He didn't like them. The story of his conversion is told three times in Acts. Part of the reason for this repetition is to stress the sovereign work of God in this change.

In one version of this story, recorded in Acts #26, Paul explains that he was sent on a mission to Damascus by the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem to arrest Jewish Christians. During this trip he was struck down. He saw a bright light. He encountered some kind of

manifestation of Jesus. In vv. 16-18 (ACTS 26:16) Paul describes what happened. Jesus told him, **“But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, (ACTS 26:17-18A) delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you 18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God...”** Such was the radical transformation of Paul. Not only was he to start promoting Jesus, but he was also to focus on telling about Him to the Gentiles. This was clearly a God thing. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Note that in v. 3 of our passage God, seemingly God the Father, is described as our Savior. In v. 4 Jesus is described as our Savior. But God the Father is also involved in our salvation not only in sending Jesus but also in choosing us before the foundation of the world.

Verse 4 concludes: **“To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.”** We see an indication here that Paul was the human instrument of the conversion of Titus. There is also a hint in the use of this phrase that there may be a problem with people in Crete who claim to be Christians but may not be. It is always a problem through Christian history to this day. There are people who claim to be followers of Jesus but who deny the basic truths of the faith.

The basis of our relationship with one another is “a common faith.” The Greek word is *koine*, from which comes *koinonia*, or fellowship. This belief in Jesus unites us together in the family of God. The Apostle John wrote in his gospel in the first chapter (JOHN 1:12-13), **“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”** The human responsibility is to believe. But the divine initiative comes from God.

Then Paul concludes his introduction with a somewhat typical greeting, which would be familiar to a Greek-speaking audience. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Thus we find the introduction to the message which is desperately needed in the midst of a pagan world. It is a message about salvation through Jesus Christ. It involves a great promise of eternal life. It comes from a gracious God who reaches out to us, often without our realization.

Tass Saada (PROJECTOR ON--- TASS SAADA) was not seeking Jesus. He was a Muslim who was born in Gaza. At the birth of Israel as a nation in 1948 his family fled to Saudi Arabia and then to Qatar. As a teenager Tass went to Jordan and joined up with the PLO. For a time he was the driver for Yasar Arafat. He was trained as a sniper, and he proceeded to fight the Israelis and sometimes other Muslims. His family tricked him into returning to Qatar and had his passport taken away. He was there for a while.

Then an opportunity came for him to go to the US. He had a cousin who lived in Missouri. When he was 23 he came to the US. He decided that he liked it here. His visa did not allow him to stay forever. So he found an American girl whom he convinced that he loved. He married her, though he later admitted he did not really love her.

Tass ended up getting a job in a French restaurant in Kansas City. He pursued a career in the restaurant business and became successful. Along the way there was a Christian businessman by the name of Charlie Sharpe who took an interest in Tass and helped him in his career. After several years Charlie invited Tass to his home to share the gospel.

Initially Tass responded negatively. At one point he got up to leave and headed for the door. Charlie asked him to sit back down and he did. This is what Tass said happened next: **“[Charlie] picked up this Bible, a brand-new one with a blue leather binding, and opened it at random. He began to read: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ He had not chosen this passage on purpose; the Bible just fell open to that place.**

“The instant he said, ‘Word,’ I began to shake. He thought he was just reading a verse of Christian Scripture. He had no idea that the Qur’an clearly says, ‘The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was... the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him.’ Hearing the Bible say essentially the same thing, that Jesus was the Word of God, struck deep to the core of my being.

“Before I knew it, I was on my knees, I didn’t consciously decide to kneel; it just happened. I lost all awareness that Charlie was even in the room. A light came into my field of vision--- a talking light. Now I know this sounds really odd, and readers may say I was hallucinating. I can only tell you how events unfolded that afternoon on Sunday, March 14, 1993.

“The light said in an audible tone, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’ I didn’t know at that moment that these words were a repetition of what Jesus said during the Last Supper. As far as I was concerned, they were a message from Jesus solely to me.

“Then, just beside the light, I saw a pair of hands folded in prayer. On the back of one of the hands, a cross had been tattooed. Instantly I thought of my childhood nanny, a young Filipino woman who worked for our family... She had had the very same cross on her hand. I had not seen her since I was ten years old, when we moved from Jiddah to Qatar. Yet I knew beyond any doubt that I was once again looking at her hands.

“In this indescribable moment, I knew something else: the triune God existed--- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I knew that this God loved me. ‘Oh, Jesus, come into my life!’ I blurted out. ‘Forgive me and be my Lord and Savior!’ I felt as if a heavy load went flying off my shoulders. A sense of peace and joy rushed into my heart.

The presence of God was so real it seemed I could almost reach out and touch it.” (Tass Saada, *Once an Arafat Man*)

Such was the dramatic conversion of Tass Saada. He went on to become an evangelist to Jews and Palestinians. He also makes efforts to bring the two groups together.
(PROJECTOR OFF)

Such is the power of God to change a life. Clearly the Lord was the Divine Initiator of all of this. This is the sovereign grace of God at work. Yet Tass Saada also believed. And the Lord used the witness of a Christian businessman and a Christian nanny to accomplish His purposes. Likewise we have a responsibility to believe, and we Christians have a responsibility to be witnesses for Jesus.