

## Living in the In-Between Times

- Titus 2:11-14
- As we said a few weeks ago, Paul's letter to Titus follows a different pattern. Instead of starting with the indicative and moving to the imperative, or from doctrine to duty, Paul does just the opposite here. That's why this section starts with the word "for." Paul has given instructions to the five groups that make up the churches in Crete, the older men, older women, younger women, younger men and the bondservants, and now he is going to tell us how we are able to do all that he has told us to do and to be in verses 2-10. How can we do it? Seven words: "For the grace of God has appeared." The only way we can live for God's glory in the in-between times is by God's grace which has always existed in the Godhead, but that appeared to us in the person of Jesus Christ when He left heaven and took on human flesh. John wrote, "We have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) And, "For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." (John 1:16)
- John Stott divides this text in Titus 2 into two main points, and I will borrow his outline this morning as we look at the epiphany of grace, and the epiphany of glory. The word for epiphany occurs eleven times in the New Testament, and only one of those times refers to a natural appearance, or the lack of one. The other ten times the word for epiphany occurs in the New Testament all refer to the appearance of Christ. Four times it refers to his first coming, and six times the word refers to his second coming. In this passage, the word is used twice to serve as bookends as we look back at the grace of God that has appeared, and we look forward to the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ in his second coming. An evangelist in England in the 1800's named Hay Aitken said the two comings of Christ were like two windows in the School of Grace. "Through the western window a solemn light streams from Mt. Calvary. Through the eastern window shines the light of sun rising, the herald of a brighter day." Let's look then through these two windows this morning, the epiphany of God's grace, and the epiphany of God's glory.
- **Epiphany of God's grace**
- What do we know about grace, just from this passage? First, it is God's grace alone that brings salvation. We can give each other grace, or 'slippage' as one brother used to say, and we should. But only God can give grace that brings salvation. I can forgive you for sinning against me, but I cannot forgive you for SIN. Only God can. We need His grace more than we need air to breathe.
- Second, God's grace brings salvation for all people. That has to be true or the rest of the Bible is false. God's grace brings salvation to the Gentiles. And to the slaves. Jesus came and preached peace to you who were far off, Paul says in Ephesians, and to those who were near. The salvation that comes through Jesus Christ is for the whole world and for all peoples. If we didn't believe that, we wouldn't care that there are still two thousand languages that don't have one word of Scripture in their own tongue. Ian Murray said the passion for missions is lost when we lose sight of the grandeur of the Gospel. Salvation is for all people because the Gospel is for all the world! We believe the vision that John had and wrote about in Rev. 7 is from God and we will see it one day: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!'" Even though we know clearly from Scripture that every person will NOT be saved, we believe that God's grace brings salvation FOR all people. And every people group will be represented in heaven. Those who have received the grace given through Jesus' death on the cross, and who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ will be there: from every tribe and tongue and nation and people group,.
- Third, grace is our teacher. We are not just saved FROM something: our sin. We are saved TO someone: our Savior. We are all enrolled in the School of Grace from the time we are first born again. And the motto of the School of God's Grace really IS 'No Child Left Behind.' And it goes way

beyond the 'Common Core.' We are equipped "for every good work," not just the common ones. That's because by His grace, "(God's) divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us..." (2 Peter 1:3) We are in the School of Grace. OK, so what are we to make sure we are learning there?

- The School of Grace teaches us, first, how to say NO. Titus 2:12, to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. Ungodliness refers to how we live, what we do, our actions. Worldly passion refers to our heart, the lusts, appetites and cravings that lead us into ungodliness. Interesting that Paul would put them in reverse order, since sin always STARTS in the heart. But isn't this how we are taught as children? We are corrected for bad behavior long before our hearts can be dealt with. You don't wait until a 2 year old can have a reasonable conversation with you about his heart condition before you discipline him for taking his bowl of oatmeal and launching it across the table! You deal with the behavior right then. But good parents will also do heart training, dealing with root issues in the hearts of their children very early on as well. Don't wait until a child is five to start disciplining for bad behavior. That's way too late. Don't wait until a child is 7-9 and 'able to reason' before you start training the heart. That is also way too late. Follow God's example. He starts with us very early, right after we are born again. That's one of the reasons why we believe with every fiber of our being that Sunday worship should be multi-generational. The hearts of the little ones in here are being shaped by God's Word as they Him hear sung about and preached about every week. The roots of those little fruit trees are sinking down into the richness of the water of God's Word. Grace teaches us to say NO.
- Grace also teaches us to say YES! We say no to ungodliness and worldly passions but we are to say YES to self-control, and to living upright and godly lives. That's what the Holy Spirit does. He teaches us, urging us to live differently in this present age, to turn from self-centeredness to self-control, and from worldly passions to a passion for God.
- The great news is that God's grace has made it possible for us to do this. But it is not just possible; it is necessary. God's grace WILL do this in the lives of those who follow Christ. There is no justification without sanctification. We don't have an option whether we will be sanctified or not, not if we have been called by God to be His! Not only that, but as Paul said in Romans, "those whom He justified, He also glorified." And that's why we are "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." (vs. 13)
- **Epiphany of God's glory**
- Again, Paul uses the same word to describe the appearance of Jesus. The second epiphany will be even more glorious than the first and will usher in the end of the ages and the beginning of our eternal reign with Christ as co-heirs with Him. "In His first appearing, Christ was grace personified," John MacArthur writes. "In His second appearing, He will be glory personified!"
- By the way, this is one of the most beautiful and powerful passages of Scripture in the whole New Testament that plainly points to the deity of Jesus Christ. We are looking for "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" to appear.
- John wrote, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2) Which is why he then wrote, "And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." (1 John 3:3)
- On the one hand, Christians should be the most heavenly-minded people on the planet. We are to set our minds on things above, not on the things of this earth. This cannot possibly be our best life NOW because we are waiting for our blessed hope. How do we HAVE hope? As Paul is writing these words, "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ," he can't help but look back again to the cross.
- Who gave Himself for us. That's the Gospel in its simplest form. Jesus gave Himself for us. He took the place of the ram caught in the thicket. He was and is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

- To redeem us from all lawlessness. We were set free. That's what the word redeem means. It refers to the release of a prisoner because someone else gave himself up and paid the ransom price. We sing about that, don't we? "Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood, Hallelujah, what a Savior!" Every believer should be able to sing that with soaring confidence and with broken-hearted gratitude at the same time. And if we are Christ's but we are NOT free, but have like the Galatians, "turned back to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world" and are enslaved by them: stop, drop and repent! Because God's purpose for you is so glorious you cannot begin to imagine it in your current state of unrepentance. He is determined to...
- And to purify for Himself a people for His own possession. For Himself! The great exchange took place when Jesus gave us His righteousness in exchange for our sins that were nailed to the cross. But the exchange now is for us to give our lives for Him! We are a people of His own possession! When several of us were at the panel discussion ten days ago or so at Elon, in which five college professors were pouring out their collective wisdom on how we can all be good WITHOUT God, I am sure my posture was tense and my demeanor was frustrated. Because Aaron, an Elon student who comes to church here now, wrote something on his phone and then handed it over to me. He had written, "Don't go all crusader on these people." I laughed. Because that is the very last thing we are called to do as followers of Jesus Christ. We do not serve God by taking the lives of those we believe to be infidels. No, we lay down our lives for the only One who can save the infidels. We are a people of His own possession, and we are to be...
- Zealous for good works. No explanation needed. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Maybe an illustration, though, because we don't want to overlook a good work that God prepared for us.
- If there's time...
- Jim Cymbala pastors the Brooklyn Tabernacle and tells this story: It was Easter Sunday and I was so tired at the end of the day that I just went to the edge of the platform, pulled down my tie and sat down and draped my feet over the edge. It was a wonderful service with many people coming forward. The counselors were talking with these people. As I was sitting there I looked up the middle aisle, and there in about the third row was a man who looked about fifty, disheveled, filthy. He looked up at me rather sheepishly, as if saying, "Could I talk to you?" We have homeless people coming in all the time, asking for money or whatever. So as I sat there, I said to myself, though I am ashamed of it, "What a way to end a Sunday. I've had such a good time, preaching and ministering, and here's a fellow probably wanting some money for more wine." He walked up. When he got within about five feet of me, I smelled a horrible smell like I'd never smelled in my life. It was so awful that when he got close, I would inhale by looking away, and then I'd talk to him, and then look away to inhale, because I couldn't inhale facing him. I asked him, "What's your name?" "David." "How long have you been on the street?" "Six years." "How old are you?" "Thirty-two." He looked fifty--hair matted; front teeth missing; wino; eyes slightly glazed. "Where did you sleep last night, David?" "Abandoned truck." I keep in my back pocket a money clip that also holds some credit cards. I fumbled to pick one out thinking; I'll give him some money. I won't even get a volunteer. They are all busy talking with others. Usually we don't give money to people. We take them to get something to eat. I took the money out. David pushed it away and said, "I don't want your money. I want this Jesus, the One you were talking about, because I'm not going to make it. I'm going to die on the street." I completely forgot about David, and I started to weep for myself. I was going to give a couple of dollars to someone God had sent to me. See how easy it is? I could make the excuse I was tired. There is no excuse. I was not seeing him the way God sees him. I was not feeling what God feels. But oh, did that change! David just stood there. He didn't know what was happening. I pleaded with God, "God, forgive me! Forgive me! Please forgive me. I am so sorry to represent You this way. I'm so sorry. Here I am with my message and my points, and You send somebody and I am not ready for it. Oh, God!" Something came over me. Suddenly I started to

weep deeper, and David began to weep. He fell against my chest as I was sitting there. He fell against my white shirt and tie, and I put my arms around him, and there we wept on each other. The smell of His person became a beautiful aroma. Here is what I thought the Lord made real to me: If you don't love this smell, I can't use you, because this is why I called you where you are. This is what you are about. You are about this smell. Christ changed David's life. He started memorizing portions of Scripture that were incredible. We got him a place to live. We hired him in the church to do maintenance, and we got his teeth fixed. He was a handsome man when he came out of the hospital. They detoxed him in 6 days. He spent that Thanksgiving at my house. He also spent Christmas at my house. When we were exchanging presents, he pulled out a little thing and he said, "This is for you." It was a little white hanky. It was the only thing he could afford. A year later David got up and talked about his conversion to Christ. The minute he took the mic and began to speak, I said, "The man is a preacher." This past Easter we ordained David. He is an associate minister of a church over in New Jersey. And I was so close to saying, "Here, take this; I'm a busy preacher."

We can get so full of ourselves.