

# A Faithful Promise of Eternal Life

By Joel Wood

**Bible Text:** Titus 1:1-2

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Titus chapter 1 verses 1 and 2. I'll be reading from the Modern English Version and preaching from it as well. Receive the word of our Lord. "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth which leads to Godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began..." The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

The Lord, who cannot lie, promised eternal life to His people and He will keep His word. The Lord, who cannot lie, promised eternal life to His people and He will keep His word. I want to draw our attention to three things from the second verse of Titus: Paul's purpose, Paul's presumption, and Paul's perspective. Paul's purpose, Paul's presumption-- I wanted to use presupposition but I know that a couple of you would get nervous if I used that word so we're gonna go with presumption-- Paul's presumption and Paul's perspective.

Firstly, Paul's purpose. As Paul is reminding Titus and First Reformed Presbyterian Church of Crete, you know they were Reformed Presbyterian right? He's reminding them that eternal life found in the knowledge and the truth which leads to godliness from verse one is of utmost importance in hope of eternal life, or perhaps better stated, upon the hope of eternal life. Paul is pointing Titus and his flock to the inestimable value of eternal life in the kingdom of God. Think of the parable that our Lord told: [Matthew 13:45] "Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls." Have you ever been on one of those treasure hunts? Perhaps you see a flea market or, uh, you know a yard sale? Saw a sign the other day for a kinda big yard sale. That made me want to go. I thought I might kinda find something that I want. But you're driving by and you see that thing sitting out in someone's front yard. This merchant is on a journey. He is going from spot on the globe to spot on the globe to spot on the globe. He's going all around the world looking for beautiful pearls. [Matthew 13:46a] "Who on finding one pearl of great price..." He finds the one the pearl to end all pearls. This is it. And what does he do? [Matthew 13:46b] "He went and sold all that he had and bought it."

As we walk through Paul's introduction, we begin to see these reasons unfold, we mentioned this last time. We see these reasons unfold of why Paul is writing this letter through Titus to Titus's church. Paul is upholding the glory of God in the eternal life that He gives His people. Now, the glory of God is the end all be all of this world. What is our purpose? Why were we made? To glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Don't forget that, brothers and sisters. I get razzed sometimes for having too much fun and perhaps I do, that's an ongoing conversation that the Lord and I have. But remember that we are to enjoy these things. That we are to a delight in them, we are to love them. If I might borrow from my friend Phil's words, a pastor in southern California, change slightly what he says but "If you're

experiencing the joy of the Lord, you need to notify your face!" Delight, be pleasant, enjoy what God is doing. But our joy and enjoyment is not the primary thing. The-- the primary thing is the glory of God to be on display.

Colossians 1 [vs 4-6] Paul says: "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you. For we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints, because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you have already heard in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has in all the world, and brings forth fruit, as it has also in you, since the day you heard it and knew the grace of God in truth." The glory of God is the end all be all of this world and yet, for the Christian, eternal life is what puts us on the path of wanting, of desiring, the glory of God to be on display in our lives. And what Paul is saying in Colossians 1 is that this eternal life brings real changes now. Brothers and sisters, if you are a believer, and have been for a long time, and are just as bitter today as you were a decade ago, you might have something-- some questions that need answered in your own heart. If you are just as prideful and arrogant today as you were a decade ago. This brings real change, the idea that there is a hope for us laid up in heaven begins to change us on this earth as the spirit applies to us the person and work of Jesus Christ. One of the biggest things is that we have hope. We have hope. Jay Adams describes this hope as "Expectation: anticipation of something that is certain because God promised it. It has none of the connotations," he says, "of our current use of the word to mean a 'hope so' hope. The blessed hope mentioned in Titus 2 is it not the blessed 'hope so!'" I love that. Hope of the Christian is a certainty that God will do what He has said He will do and this hope for the Christian is linked to eternal life which is of utmost importance to seek after, to long for, to pursue in this life.

Secondly, we see Paul's presumption. And his presumption is this, if I might borrow language from our confession, that the God who is abundant in truth and hating all of sin, inherently speaks the truth. In other words, if God says it, He will do it, and this is a biblical idea. The promises of God are sure in Christ. God proves time and time again that if He says it, it is as good as done and God's people praise Him for it and we live as if it is true because He has said it will be true. I might ask, do you believe that Christ will come again? Do you believe that? Now stop it, some of you. Some of you are already meandering into historicism, pre-mil, a-mil, post-mil, pan-mil-- Well what do you mean by Christ will come again? I mean do you believe Christ will return? Do you believe that? God has said it will happen, do you believe it to be true?

Paul pauses here, at this point in the text, to consider the character of the one about whom he is speaking. Who God is stands in stark contrast to we are. And I want to encourage us, brothers and sisters, let us not be led astray by self-righteousness. That sense of having-it-all-togetherness that we can so easily begin to live by. Did you know that I'm a liar? Did you know that I'm a murderer? Did you know that you are too? Well that's awkward, that's like talking about the health staff in a medical facility, isn't it? But we are. And can I be so bold and loving to say: when you begin to forget that-- when you began to judge others not in light of God's word but in light of 'Why aren't they more like me?'-- Be reminded they're more like you than you can even handle. Psalm 116 [vs 1] "I said in my haste, 'all men are liars.'" Matthew 5 [vs 17-20] "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one dot or one mark will pass from the law until all be fulfilled. Whoever, therefore, breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do likewise shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will in no way enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said by the ancients, 'You shall not murder,' and 'Whoever murders shall be in danger of the judgment.' But

I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be in danger of the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go on your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Reconcile with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you will by no means come out of there until you have paid the last penny. You have heard that it was said by the ancients, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away. For it is profitable that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body be thrown into hell."

This speaks of the severe measures that we should go to to flee from sin in our lives. Which one of us has shed blood in our fight against sin? Now, yes, we can do socially righteous things. Yes, we can do those actions which many would look upon and call good. But when we begin to perceive any righteousness as native to us and not foreign to us, if we begin to consider our place in the gospel as being deserved in any way on our part then we know we are far from the truth of the gospel that leads to eternal life. This prayer from Isaiah 64 [vs 1-9]: "Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might shake at Your presence, as when the melting fire burns, as the fire causes the waters to boil, to make Your name known to Your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your presence! When You did awesome things for which we did not look, You came down; the mountains quaked at Your presence. For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by ear, neither has the eye seen a God besides You, who acts for the one who waits for Him. You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, those who remember You in Your ways. Indeed, You were angry, for we had sinned; in our sins we remained a long time, and shall we be saved? But we all are as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness is as filthy rags; and we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. There is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs up himself to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us and have consumed us because of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You are our potter; and we all are the work of Your hand. Do not be wrathful beyond measure, O Lord, nor remember iniquity forever; look upon us, we pray, we all are Your people."

Remember that as you look across the room and as you look down the pew. Remember that each of us are lumps of clay and we are on the potter's wheel and He is forming us and shaping us into the instrument that He desires us to be. Each of us is different and unique in how God has made us and in what God is redeeming us unto in our lives. But we must remember that none of us stirs himself up to seek after God. The sins of the heart speak loudly to who we are without Jesus. Dr. [George] Scipione says: "The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart." Who cares if we have it all together and down pat? Who cares if our lives seem perfectly ordered on the outside if we are a boiling pot of sin on the inside? It's the heart that God is at work in. And Paul here points us to this God who promises to work in our hearts. That He is abundant in truth and He is hating all sin and He, the God who cannot lie, has promised us eternal life.

So thirdly, we see Paul's perspective. God promised man eternal life and He will do it. He promised this before the world began. We need to remember that the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness is not something of human origin or accomplishment or decision or

ultimately of human choice. God has revealed it. God has granted it. God has chosen His people. Here we-- we hear the echoings of God's decree and we-- we read this last time that-- and this from the [Westminster] Confession of Faith Chapter 3 Paragraph 5 "Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto: and all to the praise of His glorious grace." In other words if we ask "Why did God choose me to inherit eternal life," the answer follows quickly "We have no idea other than He delighted in choosing you and in loving you." The good news of Jesus Christ is predicated-- it is built on the bad news of ourselves. That there is no reason for God to want to hang out with you. To save you. To redeem you. To spend eternity with you. There is absolutely no reason. He didn't choose you because He thought "Well, I think they'll choose me so-- I choose you first!" He didn't choose you because He thought "Wow, they are really faithful. I bet if I choose them they're going to tough it out to the end. Well now I have to choose them. Why wouldn't I want them on my team?" No, there is no good reason why God loves us. That's what makes His love all the more amazing, all the more beautiful, all the more a glorious thing for us to bask together. Because it's true of all of us.

But this moves us beyond-- the text here moves us beyond God's decree, right into God's condescension and His communicating with people that He will save. [Genesis 3:15] "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel" And that's found in-- [If] you can't tell me by now, we've mentioned this every week for months. I'm sorry I couldn't do more in Genesis, there was-- there was more I wanted to do but I felt I couldn't quite do it. But this Protevangelium, this first telling of the gospel. Paul here in Titus, as he is beginning this letter to Titus, and the First Reformed Presbyterian Church of Crete, he moves us beyond this ethereal cosmic decree right down into the promise made to God's people. It's not just a word it's not just a word out there it's not even an inner trinitarian word amongst the Godhead, it is a word from God to man, to people, to men and women and boys and girls, that I will save.

We read of it again in Genesis 9 [vs 8-9] "Again God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, 'As for Me, I establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you;'" There's always kids involved, there's always offspring, there's always more of you little people coming. It's hard to believe on a day like today but more of you will show up and God's promises flow over from your parents to you as well. [Genesis 9:10-11] "And with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, every beast of the earth. I establish My covenant with you. Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood. Never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." And why is that promise important? Why do we understand that it is part of the covenant of grace? Because sin will not overwhelm again. The gospel will continue to grow and enlarge and the gospel will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas.

In Genesis 17 [vs 3-8] "Abram fell on his face and God said to him, 'As for Me, My covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer will your name be called Abram, but your name will be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. All the land of Canaan, where you now live as strangers, I will give to you and to your descendants for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.'" God promises that many nations will arise and they will come to Christ. That indeed the righteous ones of God will inherit the earth and all of His promises that He has given.

Throughout the Scripture covenantal language stands where God says I will be your God and you will be people. Again and again and again. Not just in Adam and Eve, not just and Noah and his family, not just in Abraham, but it goes on from generation to generation. "I will be your God and you will be my people." Again and again He grants this hope of eternal life, coming from the God who cannot lie and promised before the world began. The Lord, who cannot lie, promised eternal life to His people He will keep His word.

Stand with me as we pray.