

## TIMELY REMINDERS

Mountain View Alliance Church, Kitimat, BC

June 12 - 11

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Congratulations on making a choice about your next pastor. This is really big, and a very significant and timely decision. It's providential because you really do need a full-time pastor soon. Your arrangement with me has been wonderful, but we always knew it was temporary. My purpose was to work myself out of a job. And since the job included helping you find a pastor, I am quickly becoming redundant.

But I have a couple of Sundays with you before I'm gone and so I wanted to give you a few reminders. I think Titus has a very good message in that regard. So I want to encourage you to turn to that passage as we look at some critical reminders about church life and ministry.

Before I get into the text a bit more, let's take time for a little background. Who is Titus? According to Galatians 2, Titus was a non-Jewish believer whom Paul used as an illustration of how the Gospel is for Gentile, or pagan people as well. He became a companion of Paul's ministry helping out in difficult places like Corinth. He was a trusted and most devoted Christian whom Paul took with him to the island of Crete where Paul had a short ministry before leaving. He left Titus there because Paul's work had been unfinished. He also wanted him to establish good leaders for the churches on that island – especially in the midst of the tendency to false teaching and declining morality.

As we read it, note the extreme relevance of this letter to our own age and circumstance.

## TITUS

Paul's main thesis, I believe appears in the midst of the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter where he says, *The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say, NO to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These then are the things you should teach.*

I think it's so important for us to be reminded often about what life is all about from God's perspective. We live in an age and a world of great confusion when it comes to knowing and understanding God's perspective. I was reminded of this while traveling on the train yesterday from Prince George and reading Nancy Pearcey's book, *Total Truth*. Pearcey's thesis is that world view is very important and that one of the great issues in world view is the matter of origins. Then she goes on to show that though evolution is the pre-dominant world-view of our time, it has no real rational substance to commend it. It is more religious than factual. In fact, she says, the Christian world view that postulates creation by the personal God of the Bible has much more to commend it because of the obvious evidence of intelligent design in microbiology, cosmology, and biology – particularly evident in the DNA code. Her book illustrates how important it is for Christians to know what they believe and why and how their faith relates to the many details of our lives. One of the reason I love this little book of Titus so much is that it sums up what the Christian faith and the church is all about.

It is so important I think for us to know the culture of the day we're living in. Paul made a note of this as he was writing to Titus. He knew the nature of the Cretan world. He knew their propensity to moral corruption and their particular expressions of it. As someone has said, *We need to hold the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other*. We need to be exegetes of the culture of our times as well as the Bible. Too often it seems we know the Bible, but we don't know how to relate it to our lives. We are hearers of the Word, but not doers. It's like the kid I heard of who memorized hundreds of Scripture verses but somehow ended up spending his life in prison.

So it is, that during my time here, I have tried to emphasize the ways in which our culture is different today than it has been. There is a notable shift in the way a younger generation thinks. The God of the Bible is no longer central in society's thinking. Popular culture as evident in the music, television, and movies of our day is an anchorless culture. Especially in sexual matters, there are no moral absolutes. Truth is something relative to your own experience of fulfillment. People increasingly trade the notion of absolute truth for their own experience of personal fulfillment. Everything is about being yourself, about being authentic, being real. We are being told that we should aim for self-expression regardless of what others think of it.

And this is also true in places like Kitimat. People no longer come eagerly to church because they think the church is all about old religious traditions that speak of authority and rules. In fact, so often outsiders think the people in church seem to have lost touch with reality and are prejudiced, bigoted and withdrawn from the rest of the world. So often the church is seen as being reclusive...

So how in the world can Christians and the church possibly make a difference in today's very secular world? How in the world can we ever hope to survive, let alone convince our friends and neighbours about the validity of the Christian faith? Maybe we should just forget about those things and just hope and pray that it will all be over soon – that the Lord will come back for us and clean up the mess that people have made.

But, not according to what we read in Titus. Paul would say NO! On one hand we need to be reassured again and again of the absolute truth and righteousness of the Gospel. We need to remember with what kind of authority it came to us by those who brought it to us. We need to remember the apostleship of people like Paul and the historical reality of Jesus Christ and his coming into the world. We should never, never, never, never -- abandon the idea of truth as a body of facts that are real and that explain why the world is as it is and what it's all about. Most of all, we should never, never, never forget that God, in His most amazing grace, reached down to us in this one who became the God-man. Just this week I was reading Psalm 84 and reflecting on its expression of how awesome it is to dwell in the house of the Lord forever and ever. Or of just how great it is to live our lives as people who have experienced the grace of the Gospel.

Titus had that kind of assignment in the island of Crete that would ensure the permanence of the Gospel. There was no doubt in Paul's mind or in the heart and mind of Titus of the validity of the Gospel, or of its authority, or of the authority that God had given to them to make this Gospel known. Titus' task was to finish the work of the Gospel that had begun on Crete and to establish leaders who could effectively lead the church.

And in a similar way, that's my hope and prayer for the church here in Kitimat. You live and work in a very beautiful place. And though it is small, and tucked away in the mountains, it is not insignificant. It is a place of many different cultures. But it is also a place of many beliefs that are not built on God's truth. But God cares deeply about the people of this place which is why He has placed the church here in its different forms.

As on the island of Crete, God's work here will take leadership and good solid teaching.

## 1. Solid Leadership

What Paul speaks of here in terms of church leadership is the same standard everywhere. We see a similar list in 1 Timothy. It is a list of characteristics that is consistent with what the Bible teaches elsewhere through leaders like Moses and David and with Jesus' own leadership. What Paul describes here is not some lofty standard that only an elite group of people should aspire to. No, this is a list of characteristics that is basic to what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Gene Getz, in his great little book called, *The Measure of a Man*, says this is his desire for every godly man, for every Christian. But it is especially so for men who are called to lead in the life and ministry of Christ's church.

- **Strong Family Values.** He ought to be a man of high moral conviction and standards – a faithful husband to his wife who takes responsibility and leadership in his home in a way that causes children to also live and believe the truth of the Gospel.
- **Self-Control.** As one entrusted with God's work a leader should demonstrate a great deal of patience and self-control.
- **Hospitality and Goodness.** He should be a person who is given to hospitality, to the pursuit of that which is true, righteous, and good – who carries himself with sense self-discipline.
- **Biblical Knowledge and Communication.** And not least of all, he should be a person who knows how to encourage some and refute others by his knowledge and understanding of God's Word.

One of the primary tasks of the pastor who is coming your way is for him be this kind of leader and to develop these kinds of leaders in the church with a view to seeing the Gospel penetrate the false teachings and ideas that exist in the minds of people in this community. And regardless of your place in the community and the church, you can have an important part in seeing this happen. Remember the goal – which is to finish the work that's been begun by others in seeing the Gospel firmly established in this City. Live by these standards yourself and don't expect anything less from those who are called to lead here.

## 2. Sound Teaching

One of Paul's emphases in this little letter to Titus is that he would teach and communicate things that have to do with *sound doctrine*. We see the evidence of this in the first few verses as well as in 1:9 and 2:1. What he means is that Titus should bring all his energies to bear on communicating what is consistent with God's revelation of truth in the Gospel. At least three times in this short letter, Paul outlines the nature of that Gospel – in the first verses, in 2:11 and then again in 3:3 and following.

The Gospel is embedded in what the Word of God is all about. And today too, we need to have a firm conviction about the reasonableness of this truth that we have come to believe and how it is different from all the other “isms” and false beliefs of our day. And secondly, we need to know how the knowledge of this Gospel results in a practical difference of how we live. And it is this latter sense of sound doctrine that Paul seems to stress.

- Teach the older men...to demonstrate Christian maturity
- Teach the older women... to be reverent and to teach the younger women...
- Encourage the young men... to exercise self-control and be sure to demonstrate these things in your own life.
- Teach slaves...to be respectful and submissive to their employers
- Remind the people...

In general, teach the people how the Gospel results in living upright, good lives and in doing good to others. This is what good doctrine is all about. It has a very practical outcome. It is not merely about dotting your tees and crossing your “i’s.” In fact, Paul takes pains to remind Titus that he should *not give attention* to foolish arguments about fine points of biblical legalism. This kind of talk is unprofitable and useless. He even tells him that if someone is like this, you should warn him once, and a second time, but after that distance yourself from that kind of person.

So according to Paul, there is a place for that kind of action, that kind of discipline. In the work of God, there are times when we will need discernment, discretion, and to take actions of that kind of judgment. Because part of the

Gospel is that God makes a distinction between good and evil, and does bring ultimate judgment upon Satan and his followers.

## Conclusion

We need to remember that in the Gospel, God has given us a very, very precious gift. It is a gift of saving grace from the judgment of sin. The Gospel is a gift that gives eternal life. It is a Gospel that saves us from the corruption of sin and death. It is a Gospel that is the extension of what is good and true in the Word of God.

As Paul says to Titus in his day, so God says to us through these same words in our day, “Learn to know this Gospel and its application to your lives. Live your life in the truth and beauty of this Gospel. Learn to distinguish it from the many other beliefs out there that are contrary to what it is. Find leaders in the church who will emulate this Gospel by their lives and teaching. And live out this Gospel in all the different roles that you occupy in order to reflect its truth and to convince others of its truth.

## COMMUNION

There is a ritual in the church, established by Jesus himself, in which we celebrate the truth of this Gospel. It is variously called the last supper or communion. It is a way for us to remember what the Gospel is essentially all about – how God in Christ came to offer forgiveness and fellowship to us through His death. Our participation in it is a sign that we have come to understand and embrace this Gospel. It is a sign of our fellowship with Jesus and with one another. It is a sign of our commitment to live out this Gospel.

Luke 22:19 – the Bread

Luke 22:20 – the Cup

Luke 22:29 – the Conclusion

## Benediction

