

April 4, 2010

Titus 3:5 He Saved Us

Alright good morning. I'm so glad you chose to worship with us this morning. If you will grab your Bibles and turn to the book of Titus and if you'd like, you can pull out the message map in your worship guide to help take some notes this morning.

We have been working our way through this book of Titus for almost 7 months now. We know that Titus as a whole is a compact, 3-chapter blueprint from God for establishing his church and we've covered several of the elements of that blueprint. Where we are in chapter 3 is God's plan for the church's relationship with the world around it and in the midst of that we find this incredible statement of doctrine, of truth, that serves in so many ways as the foundation for God's church. And I love that we are we are today – on Easter Sunday – God has us focusing on the heart of verses 3 -7 which is found in verse 5. But to get the context, let's go back and remind ourselves what God is saying through the apostle Paul. Let's read **verses 3-7**.

TEXT

There is one phrase in the heart of this passage – it's found at the beginning and middle of verse 5 – just three words in English. "He saved us." In those simple words you have not only the core of this passage, but the core of the Christian faith. It is all about salvation.

And we know that – even those who aren't in a worship service very often know that. We sing about His salvation. We talk about His salvation. We even pray thanking God for saving us. It is a profound concept and it is the essence of Christianity. And as such the word "saved" has really become a uniquely distinctive Christian term with long term implications. But in the Greek language the New Testament is written in, the original verb "sozo" which is translated "saved" could mean a temporal deliverance.

In fact in the gospel of Matthew it is used a number of times in the temporary mindset. In Matthew 8:25 – the disciples are out in a storm on the sea of Galilee and cry out "Lord save us – we're dying here" and they weren't talking about spiritual salvation – they were talking about physical rescuing from a storm that was about to eat their lunch. So **the word "saved" by itself refers to a RESCUING of someone in imminent, grave, serious, and even permanent danger or disaster**. The question then becomes that **if "He saved us" is the core of Christianity** – and we have a handle now on what the word "saved" means – **then the question is saved FROM WHAT?**

And if you listen to the way a lot of preachers speak about the gospel, frankly, the condition we need to be saved from doesn't sound so grave. You get the idea that humanity mainly needs to be rescued from its lack of fulfillment. Maybe your marriage hasn't worked out according to plan or your kid isn't turning out to be the next Einstein, or your dream career has turned out to be a dead end. You get that. You look at the travel brochures and you really want a month in Europe but you end up with a three day trip to see the in-laws. Life just doesn't deliver.

According to the gospel some are preaching, Jesus will take care of that. He'll fix your marriage – he'll help you raise confident kids full of self-esteem, he'll help you climb the corporate ladder, or whatever. Everything you've longed for has turned out wrong and that's the way it's going to end. But Jesus will take care of it – he'll rescue you from your unfulfilled life.

Others are presenting a gospel as if the great hope of salvation is relief from destructive habits. Jesus is the stepping stool – the boost you need to get out of the hole you've fallen into. Many are enslaved to these habits – drinking, smoking, pornography, overeating, uncontrolled temper and rage, sexual sin – both homosexual and heterosexual. But Jesus will come along and fix all that – he'll pull you right out of the flood of filth by saving you from your own desires so you won't destroy your life.

Now can the gospel deliver you from an unfulfilled life? From addiction to destructive habits? Absolutely – but that answer needs to be qualified. As John MacArthur says – there is a sense in which the gospel secondarily makes an application to those things. Without getting too far ahead of ourselves today let me just read you what he explains – "When you are genuinely saved, you belong to God and the Holy Spirit takes up residence in you. You do have a new reason to live – the hope of eternal life – the promise of heaven and that has a dramatic effect on your lack of fulfillment in life. And when you experience the power of the Holy Spirit to renew and change you, you can see victory over those destructive habits that your sinful nature creates. That's all true. But those are not the primary issue in salvation."

What's the point? It is that **finding FULFILLMENT and overcoming bad HABITS cannot be the most important understanding of what God saves us from.** Why? Because not everybody in the world is unfulfilled – in fact that is in many ways a product of our Western culture. A lot of people are content with their present condition. And not everyone is driven to a point of desperation and disaster by their passions and desires either. So those things can't be the universal problem. So what are we saved from? What is the heart of this passage in Titus talking about?

Well these verses in Titus 3 are mirrored incredibly well in Ephesians chapter 2 – we were there briefly last Sunday – but I want us to take a deeper look today and really see how God connects what we see in Titus with what He says in Ephesians. So turn to Ephesians chapter 2 with me – just a few pages to the left. Keep what we read in Titus 3:3-7 in mind as you read **Ephesians 2:1-7** with me. TEXT

What do we have to be saved from? Sin and death. There are probably no clearer statements than those first few verses of Ephesians 2 on the sinfulness of man – that really lays it out. **The imminent, grave, serious, and even permanent danger or disaster we need to be rescued from is SIN and DEATH.**

That phrase there in verse 1 that we were “*dead in our transgressions and sins*” in the Greek is called a locative of sphere – it is **talking about the sphere in which we exist.** It is not a ‘because of’ – **we aren't dead BECAUSE of our transgressions and sins;** it is an ‘in’ – a position – **we are dead IN our transgressions and sins.**

The word “transgressions” is “paraptēma” that means to slip or fall or stumble – to go the WRONG direction. The other word “sins” there is the word “hamartia” which simply means to miss the TARGET, to miss the mark. A man shoots his arrow and misses the target. Both are true of man. A lot of commentators try and make distinctions between them, but basically it is two ways of looking at the same thing. **God just uses two words – both in the plural – to show the totality of sinfulness that goes hand in hand with and is the RESULT of our being dead.**

Real quick – when we say missing the mark – what do we mean by that? I mean if we are looking at what “saved” really means in the midst of its ubiquitous use in the church, what about sin? Well here it is in a nutshell – the biblical definition of sin is a failure to hit God's target. Which is what? **Romans 3:23** says “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” **Sin is a failure to GLORIFY God.**

It doesn't mean when we say that a person is a sinner that every person is at the same level of corrupt sinning. You could have 20 dead corpses and they could all have varying degrees of decay going on, but they'd all be dead, right? So it is in human history – we are all dead but there are variance in the decaying of what is left. But sin isn't a question ultimately decay but of falling short of something.

In other words – get this – we all know that a thief is a sinner – a murderer is a sinner – a rapist is a sinner – a liar is a sinner, etc. But **sin has much more to do with what you DON'T do than what you do.** Sin is really an issue of what you don't do and what you don't do is glorify God. God says to be perfect like He is, to be holy like He is. Glory – holiness – perfection – that's where we fail. There may be differing levels of morality or decadence but we all fall short.

It'd be like if we all took a trip to Possum Kingdom Lake and lined up on one side and said ok, we're all going to jump and see who can jump to the other side. You can have as long a run as you want and you can jump just like everyone else and we'd all end up in different levels in the water but nobody would get to the other side. And the same thing is true spiritually – that's what we're talking about. There may be different levels of attainment in human life – in morality and so forth – but nobody get to the glory of God – nobody gets to perfection – nobody gets to holiness.

And I just want to point that out today because a lot of times we meet good people – people we'd describe as those who do civic good or humanitarian good – who say I'm a wonderful father, I love my wife, love my kids, take care of things – I'm generous, and kind. Listen – nobody would ever deny that that's great – that that's a wonderful way to live. Even Jesus in Luke 8:33 recognized that sinners do ‘good’ to each other – but people who do that kind of ‘good’ are still called what? Sinners. Because relational niceness or just use the word goodness isn't the issue. **Being a GOOD neighbor or father or mother or parent isn't the issue. The point is what you don't do – you don't live a holy life – you don't live a perfect life – you don't reach the standard that reflects our Creator. The issue is the GLORY of God.**

So we are all in that realm of sin – that position of sin – and we are all there because we are dead. See nobody would deny that we've got problems in our world – in fact we have problem solvers all over the place. People tell us that the real problems man faces are social problems. It is an inability to live in harmony with his

social environment – he can't get along with the people around him, he needs to be socially aware, socially sensitive, socially educated.

Others come along and say the real problem of man is psychological – it isn't social. It isn't about his relationships with others but with his relationship with himself. He can't get in touch with his own inner feelings; he can't calm down his inner anxieties. He needs somehow to be at peace with himself – to cultivate self-esteem.

There are still others who tell us man's problem is not social and it's not psychological, it is environmental. It's the way he's been treated. People have traumatized him and abused him and beaten him and done all kinds of stuff to him and he can't get along in the complexity of the world. He's misunderstood and it is his environment that messes him up. So man is out of harmony with the people around him, he's out of harmony with himself, and he's out of harmony with his environment and that's his problem.

Hogwash. That's not his problem. That's not the problem at all. Those are symptoms of the problem. **Man's problem isn't social, psychological, or environmental, man's problem is that he is DEAD** – absolutely dead. We spent most of last Sunday looking at the total depravity of man so I won't belabor the point again. We are already in **Ephesians** so if you want to you can look at **chapter 4 verse 18** and get the gist of it. There God explains that man is separated from the life of God. Spiritually dead. His body lives but man is dead. He is empty of the life that recognizes God. He can't know God. He can't understand God. He's insensitive to God, can't comprehend God, can't have a relationship with God, can't do God's will or fulfill God's Word so he can't enjoy God's blessing. As John Edie the old Scottish preacher put it – "Men without Christ are death walking." They are spiritual zombies because they don't know they're dead and they're still going through some motions. Death walking.

And here is why that is so dangerous. **Man is spiritually DEAD in sin but physically alive. But if man dies physically while still spiritually dead – still alienated from God – still separated from the life of God – then man STAYS that way forever: separated from God existing not in sin, but in Hell for eternity.**

That is why this word "saved" is so crucial and so correctly descriptive of what God does for us. But here's the other side I want us to see. Though "saved" in its normal sense just has that negative connotation – being saved from whatever. In the spiritual sense – how it is used so often in the church of God – **saved not only has the negative sense of rescuing us FROM imminent disaster or deadly danger. It also has a positive sense in that yes we are rescued from danger but saved FOR blessing.** As **Colossians 1:13-14** "*For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*"

And we see that in both Titus 3 and Ephesians 2. In **Ephesians 2:5** it says "God made us alive." In **Titus 3:5** it says God rebirthed and renewed us. In **Titus 3:7** it says we have the hope of eternal life. And in **Ephesians 2:7** it says that God shows us the riches of his grace and kindness for the coming ages.

We are made alive – saved for eternal life. But what we understand from these verses is that **You aren't saved primarily to keep you out of hell – you were saved primarily so that God could not only give you life but shower His GRACE and BLESSINGS on you forever.**

Think about that today. What a space there is between Titus 3:3 – being foolish and deceived and enslaved and full of malice and hate and Titus 3:7 – having the hope of eternal life.

What a space there is between Ephesians 2:1 – dead in transgressions and sins and objects of God's wrath and Ephesians 2:7 – seated in the heavenly realms and bearing the incomparable riches of God's grace and kindness. Who would have thought of bridging that gap? Why would they? **How** would they?

Well in the past couple of weeks in our study of Titus we've already looked at who – that only God can bring the dead to life. We've already looked at why – that because of who God is, because of His kindness, love, and mercy. And we've already looked at how – that the Holy Spirit regenerated and renews us – giving us life where there was nothing but death.

But before we wrap up this morning, I want us to look at the medium of this salvation – of our being saved. Back in Ephesians 2 it says in verse 5 that "God made us alive with Christ."

Back in **Titus 3:6** the Word really says it better - that all of it happened "**through JESUS CHRIST our Savior.**"

Oh the simplicity amidst the profoundness of the Christian gospel. You can see it from the get-go. When the angel told Joseph in **Matthew 1:21** *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

When God the Father gave God the incarnate Son a name, He proclaimed this rescue mission in no uncertain terms. Jesus – the Greek version of the Hebrew name Joshua – that means Savior. And now **Acts 4:12** declares *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*

Saved from sin – saved from death. Saved because of the kindness, love, and mercy of God. Saved for life eternal and the blessings of God forever. Saved through Christ – in Christ – with Christ. Now we’re getting to what Easter is all about – what the Resurrection is all about.

In **John 11:25-26** Jesus says: *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”*

What is he saying? Well what the Scripture is saying is that Jesus not only died for our sins, but he rose to provide our life. The amazing truth of the Gospel is that sinners were dead in trespasses and sin. And as such, were objects of God’s wrath. But God took his wrath, diverted it away from the sinners, and poured it out on Christ on the cross, who died under the wrath of God, took the wrath for us.

Then, Jesus went into the grave, and rose out of the grave for us. His death was applied to us. His resurrection is applied to us. Romans 6:3-5 probably explains it better than anywhere else how when Jesus went into the grave, spiritually that was for us. And when he came out, it was for us. And God applies it to us.

This is the great miracle of the Gospel. This is the heart of the Christian faith, my friend...this is what you must understand. This is Christianity. It is this: sinners are headed for eternal damnation because they're in a state of spiritual death. God offers them life. How? By taking care of their sin, as justice requires and pouring out all his wrath on Christ, by raising Christ from the dead, having conquered death, for us. His resurrection can be our resurrection. That's the meaning of Christ's resurrection...it wasn't just somehow an illustration of the fact that you can triumph over your trouble, it wasn't just a spiritual, mystical, whimsical kind of resurrection in that the Spirit of Jesus, who was nice to poor people and children, ought be alive in us today; the resurrection was a historical fact...**Jesus died, and he rose again. But when he died, he was bearing OUR SINS, and when he came out of the grave, he was providing OUR LIFE. And God applied his sacrifice and his resurrection to us. That's the wonder of Easter – that is what “He saved us” is all about.**

Well - the final matter is to answer the crucial question, how do I move from one to the other, isn't that the question? **How do I stop being among the living dead and come to be among the alive in Christ?**

Well the answer is back in **Ephesians 2:8-9** –if you’re still there you can read it with me. *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

Here is the sum of it all ... this is the answer. How does it happen? **Through FAITH.** And that not of yourselves. It's not a work that you do, it is the gift of God, it's not a result of works so that no one should boast. There's no place for self effort, there's no place for boasting, no place for self-congratulation, no human achievement, it's not of works, it says it's of faith, through faith. So what is that? What do you mean through faith?

I'll give you a simple definition of faith. **Faith is a GOD-GIVEN CONVICTION...a God-given conviction...that the forgiveness of sins, the promise of new life, and the hope of eternal heaven, through Jesus Christ, is true.** Did you get that? Faith is a God-given conviction that the forgiveness of sins, the promise of new life, and the hope of eternal heaven, through Jesus Christ, is true. And, that conviction moves the will to ask God for that gift. That's saving faith. The conviction that it's true, **that moves the will to ask God for that gift and to live in it.**

If God is giving you that conviction today, then act in faith through your will by asking for those truths. “God I believe you – I want my sins forgiven in Christ – I want you to give me life in Christ – I want to be with you forever through Jesus.” That’s saving faith.

I think it will be Tuesday – not this one – but next Tuesday is the anniversary day of the sinking of the Titanic. Over 2000 people died when the Titanic, the unsinkable ship, sank. The amazing part of the story, and I think

what fascinates people about it, is that many of them reached their dead-end voluntarily. The whole idea that “the band played on” you know? I understand many of them refused – even with scorn - a life boat when there was a chance to get on one. It pulled away half empty while they were convinced the ship couldn't actually sink. So they went to their death.

The world we live in is nothing but a larger Titanic. Let me tell you something folks, this world is sinking fast. And all the environmentalists, and all the politicians, and all the educators, and all the psychologists, and all the religionists, - all the king's horses and all the king's men so to speak - can't stop the leaks. The whole world is sinking fast. And the band's playing, and with some people it's life as usual. But we're going down, folks. We're going down. And Jesus is the only lifeboat who saves from inevitable death, and takes you to life eternal. Only a fool dies voluntarily when Jesus offers himself as your lifeboat. That's what Titus 3 is all about.

Titus 3:4-6: *“When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.”*

The foundation of God's church and the core of Christianity is the profound simplicity of Easter – HE SAVES US through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Is that the conviction of your life today?

Let's pray together.