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Summing Up Titus
Titus 3:12-15
June 28th, 2015, Jeff Germo

This is the last sermon in this series. I have thoroughly enjoyed digging into this letter. I have to say that each week as I mined this ancient text I was eager to see what sort of new nuggets we would find. I was never disappointed. There has been so much good stuff. As we are wrapping this up I have the feeling like I am getting ready to say farewell to someone who has become a good friend in a very short time. It has been such a good experience for me to get to know Titus. But, just like with other good friends, we need to make the effort to visit him several times a year.

In this last section, Paul closes off this letter in the same way he concludes all of his letters. He gives some final greetings. He repeats his thesis statement, or the main theme of his letter, and then he gives a short benediction or a blessing. I'd like to touch on all the verses, but we will focus today on verse 14 because it's the main point in this passage. The surrounding verses are sort of scenery. They add context, but they aren't the main point.

[2]

Titus 3:12–15 (ESV)

12 When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.

We don't know anything about Artemas because this is the only place he is mentioned in the New Testament. Tychicus, however, is mentioned several times. In Acts, Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Timothy. In both Ephesians and Colossians Paul calls him a ***“beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord.”***

Likely, these are both men that Paul has mentored, and he trusts them. He hasn't decided which one he will send to take Titus' place yet, but when he does decide, one of them will go to Crete and relieve Titus so he can go to Nicopolis where Paul is going to go before winter hits.

[3]

13 Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing.

Zenas, the Lawyer, is only mentioned here in Titus, so we know nothing about him either, other than the fact that he is a lawyer and that he and Apollos are with Titus in Crete at the moment. Likely Paul sent them to Titus with this very letter we are studying. And Paul tells Titus to make sure they are taken care of and to send them back quickly.

[4]

14 And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

We are just going to zip on past this one and come back to it in a couple minutes.

[5]

15 All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.

Paul ends his letter by sending his love to the church in Crete, and then gives a typical, but very short benediction. ***“Grace be with you all.”***

Grace is a major theme in Paul’s writings. He uses the Greek word *charis*, 109 times in his letters. He opens this letter up with a blessing of grace in 1:4 and then closes off with a blessing of grace in the very last verse. Everything else is sandwiched between the grace of God. We so desperately need his grace. We are lost without it.

In 2:11 he says;

[6]

Titus 2:11 (ESV)

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,

If it weren’t for the grace of God we would all be lost. Salvation is not possible without it. We talked a lot about that last week. We cannot merit God’s favour without him gifting it to us.

And then in the passage we looked at last week, Paul reiterates this.

[7]

Titus 3:4–7 (ESV)

4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Many years ago, when I was a young man, I was attending a church where the pastor would preach continually about grace. Every Sunday he would preach about grace. I went to that church for several years and the only sermon he seemed to preach was the grace of God packaged in different ways. And I was getting tired of it. I wanted to hear something else. And so I went up to the pastor and I said, “How come you always preach about the grace of God? I want to hear about something else. Grace, grace, grace. That’s all we ever hear.” Now, if I ever get criticism about my preaching I always think back to that and say, “It’s all coming back to me. I’m reaping what I have sown.”

Anyway, the pastor looked at me and very gently said, “Jeff, that’s all there is.”

[8]

And that’s what Paul says too. In Every letter he writes blessings of grace: Romans; 1 Corinthians; 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; 1 Thessalonians; 2 Thessalonians; 1 Timothy; 2 Timothy; Titus; and Philemon. Every single letter. And many times he sandwiches the body of the letter between a blessing of grace in his introduction and one in his conclusion, with sprinklings of grace in between. Why? Because **everything depends on God’s grace**. We are lost without it.

There's an article in Charles Stanley's *In Touch Magazine* from a few years ago that relates very much to this. In it the editor interviews Max Lucado about his new book called, *Grace*. I'd like to read some of this interview for you. The writer introduces the interview with these opening comments:

[9]

There's something about this supernatural grace that stays with us from start to finish and, day after day, makes it possible for us to live. And that's because, according to Max Lucado, there's more to God's grace than we often realize. In Touch spoke with the author about the topic of his book, Grace, and why it's not a one-time gift but the very heartbeat of spiritual transformation.

[10]

In Touch: *You've said that "grace is the voice that calls us to change and then gives us the power to pull it off." The idea that grace is connected with change isn't something we hear a lot.*

[11]

Max Lucado: *It's wonderful to see that grace is something God already did for us, and how it moved us from unforgiven to forgiven. But to really see His grace for all it is, we need to recognize it as something God is doing now. It's the word the Bible uses to describe His ongoing, aggressive commitment to change us from the inside out.*

[12]

In Touch: *How does God's grace empower us?*

[13]

Max Lucado: *I love the word picture in [Ezekiel 36:26-27](#) of God giving us a new heart. He says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you." This prophecy from the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New. Upon my conversion, God took my old heart out and put a new heart in. I'm still learning to live with this new heart, but it has such potential and brings such promise because my new heart is the heart of Jesus inside me.*

[14]

A Christian is actually a person in whom Christ is happening. For many years I missed this truth. I knew that I was working with Christ and He was with me. But I never imagined He was in me. This heart transplant is an aspect of grace we Christians haven't discussed enough.

[15]

In Touch: *Why do you think we miss out on this aspect of grace and try to live for God on our own strength?*

[16]

Max Lucado: *Grace goes so contrary to everything else in life; it's just so unlike anything. Everything else in life is a barter system. We work, so we get paid. We love others; we hope they will love us back. Then we come into a relationship with God with the same idea—that it's going to be some type of exchange with a merit system. Grace is just so unlike any religion or philosophy.*

[17]

Religion says that if you do good, God will notice you. The Bible says God has already noticed you. He's loved you and adopted you, and given you a new heart. Now go out and do good. It just really kind of flips everything upside down. It's

hard for us to believe how great grace is, so we settle for a wimpy grace. We settle for one we understand, and we pay a price for doing so.¹

[18]

It's God's grace that initially gives us life in Christ and its God's grace that changes us moment by moment now.

We desperately need God's grace. And that's why Paul typically sandwiches everything he says between blessings of grace. And it's out of that grace that good works and righteousness flow. But, we have a hard time with the tension we create between works and grace. It's not natural for us because we live in a society that continually tells us we have to earn it.

Let's go back to verse 14 now, and it should make more sense to us.

[19]

Titus 3:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

Do you get this? Paul starts off with God's grace right at the beginning. There is a whole bunch of good works in the middle. And then he closes off with more of God's grace. What does that give us? A huge beautiful, tasty, grace sandwich. It should all make sense now. God's grace makes all the work possible. We don't do the work to merit God's grace. We allow his grace to work through us, transforming us into the character of Christ so he can live his life through us.

Let's skim through the book and see this same theme coursing through the letter.

[20]

Titus 1:1 (ESV)

¹ Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness,

[21]

Titus 2:7–8 (ESV)

⁷ Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, ⁸ and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.

[22]

Titus 2:11–13 (ESV)

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

[23]

Titus 2:13–14 (ESV)

¹ http://www.intouch.org/magazine/content.aspx?topic=Grace_That_Empowers#.USMvq6V89k8

13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

[24]

Titus 3:1–2 (ESV)

1 Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, 2 to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

[25]

Titus 3:8 (ESV)

8 The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

[26]

Titus 3:14 (ESV)

14 And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

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And then Paul ends with **“Grace be with you all.”** What we have here is a big, juicy, beautiful, tasty grace sandwich. We so desperately need his grace and yet that desperation causes us to push God away. We think we need to be strong. We think we can do it on our own. We can’t. What we need, friends, is to admit to ourselves and to others that we are helpless and we need God.

Max Lucado, in another of his books, *“In the Grip of Grace”* tells a wonderful story about an interesting young man that he sat beside on an airplane. I may have shared this with you before, but it’s a great story and worth repeating.

[28]

“Good, I’m glad you’re sitting by me. Sometimes I throw up.” Not exactly what you like to hear from the airline passenger in the next seat. Before I had time to store my bag in the overhead compartment, I knew his name, age, and itinerary. “I’m Billy Jack. I’m fourteen, and I’m going home to see my daddy.” I started to tell him my name, but he spoke first.

[29]

“I need someone to look after me. I get confused a lot.” He told me about the special school he attended and the medication he took. “Can you remind me to take my pill in a few minutes?” Before we buckled up he stopped the airline attendant. “Don’t forget about me,” he told her. “I get confused.”

[30]

Billy Jack was a little boy in a big body. “Can clouds hit the ground?” he asked me. I started to answer, but he looked back out the window like he’d never asked. Unashamed of his needs, he didn’t let a flight attendant pass without a reminder: “Don’t forget to look after me.”

[31]

When they brought the food: “Don’t forget to look after me.” When they brought more drinks: “Don’t forget to look after me.” When any attendant would pass, Billy Jack would urge: “Don’t forget to look after me.”

[32]

I honestly can’t think of one time Billy Jack didn’t remind the crew that he needed attention. The rest of us didn’t. We never asked for help. We were grownups. Sophisticated. Self-reliant. Seasoned travelers. Most of us didn’t even listen to the emergency landing instructions. (Billy Jack asked me to explain them to him.) Billy Jack would have understood the idea of grace.

[33]

Have you? Many haven’t. We are sophisticated, mature. Confession of need is admission of weakness, something we are slow to do. That’s why I think Billy Jack would have understood grace. It occurred to me that he was the safest person on the flight. Had the plane encountered trouble, he would have received primary assistance. The flight attendants would have bypassed me and gone to him. Why? He had placed himself in the care of someone stronger.

[34]

One last thought. Billy Jack spent the final hour of the flight with his head on my shoulder, his hands folded between his knees. Just when I thought he was asleep, his head popped up and he said, “My dad is going to meet me at the airport. I can’t wait to see him because he watches after me.”

Friends, if we only knew how much our Heavenly Father cares for us, and accepts us just the way we are, because of Jesus, we would stop doing our good works to be accepted by him and would, instead, let the good works, and the fruit flow out of the grace he continually gives us.

[35]

Now, there is a tension in what we have been talking about. On the one side of that tension I have said that we need to strive, struggle, toil, work, and train. And on the other side I have said we need to give up striving and toiling and struggling. So, which is it? Is it struggling, or is it giving up? The answer is a resounding, “Yes”! It’s both. We need to stop trying to earn God’s favour, or gain points by the good works we do, or the fruit that is produced. God loves us. We do not need to earn his love. He cannot love us any more that he already does. Nothing we do will make him love us more. Nothing we do will make him love us any less. His love is perfect. So, stop striving.

On the other end of the tension is that we need to struggle to cooperate with the Spirit of Jesus as he does his work in our hearts. Change is hard. It takes a huge amount of effort. It takes training. We’ve seen that all through Scripture. But, the effort is not to earn his favour or love. It’s to join him in his work of transformation like the caterpillar struggling to get out of his cocoon. If we give up the struggle we atrophy and die.

God’s grace is enough, friends. God’s grace gives us life, and freedom, and a relationship with him. And growth and maturity are made possible through his grace. None of this is possible without the grace of God, but it also takes a tremendous amount of work as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

There are areas in each of our lives we struggle with. We all have pieces of our characters that are not what they should be. None of us is perfect at being loving, joyful, peaceful, patient or kind. We all need help. We are broken. It is not weakness to admit you can't do it on your own. It is actually an act of courage. Ruthie and I regularly talk to each other about the ways we need to grow and we invite feedback from the other. I want to grow. I don't want to get to my death bed and find out I was not open to listening to people when they tried to tell me I had blind spots that were getting in the way of my relationships. It's actually a loving and gracious thing to do. What are the ways you know you need to grow? If you can't name a few ways, you need to ask someone you trust to be honest and loving enough to tell you some of them. And don't settle for, "You're perfect the way you are." That's a lie. Be okay hearing some hard truths about yourself. This is so important. You will be glad you did. Jesus said, "The truth will set you free."

Several years ago I preached a sermon on "The One Anothers" in the Bible. These are all the places where the Bible says things like, "Love one another", "Carry one another's burdens," "Pray for one another," "Live in harmony with one another," etc. I think I listed over fifty verses like that from the New Testament. An older lady in the congregation came up to me a couple Sundays later and said she was very convicted by the sermon. She had been someone who was very known for being negative. She complained about everything. If there was nothing to complain about she would make something up. She apologized and said she had been the worst offender and wanted to make it right. I asked her if she would be willing to tell her story one Sunday and she did and it was very powerful. It changed the hearts of many people. A couple years ago I asked her current pastor how she is doing and he said she is growing so much and is more and more supportive all the time. She was courageous enough to own up to her negativity and allow the Holy Spirit to change her. It was hard, but she is now a very happy person and for the last several years has been working together with the leadership of the church making a difference for Jesus in their community.

That is what God wants to do in all of our hearts. None of us has arrived. We are all in need of growth and we need to surrender our sin and shortcomings to the Lord and allow him to change us from the inside out. He is gracious. We can trust him with this process. You will be so glad you did.

Let me just close off with this one final benediction from Paul in Colossians 2.

[36]

Colossians 2:6-7 (NIV)

⁶So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.