

A CHURCH THAT'S GOING PLACES

Introduction to Titus

I'm excited this morning to be introducing our new study in the book of Titus! The more I study this short and simple little letter, the more excited I am because I know God is going to do big things in and through our church because of it. We will be enjoying increased fellowship and reaping eternal rewards as a result of our serious attention and application of this book. This book does such a good job of summarizing a church's priorities: Sound doctrine and sound living. It's actually quite a wonder to me why personally I've never heard it preached more or in depth and I think that's one of the reasons I chose it – you just don't hear much about Titus. And this morning I want to do what we did with Galatians and give us some solid **reasons to study** the book and some **background** on the book to help us get a feel for where we're going with it and **the purpose** Paul wrote it.

But before I get into some more formal reasons to study it, I want to let you know a little why I chose this book *for our church right now*. Basically, this book has been on my mind for some time now, ever since the flooding and the disaster that came from the “bomb cyclone” this spring. When all of the spring flooding was happening and relief efforts were underway, I started to think about Titus because it's all about good deeds and good works and I felt like we should be doing more to help out – not to mention we were in the middle of Galatians 3 and 4 and my head was reeling from all of the great doctrine we were studying and our minds were full but I was reaching the point where I wanted to get more practical. And Titus is practical. It's **an active book**. When you read it, you can't help but want to get out there and do something for the Lord with your life. That's why I've titled it **TITUS: A CHURCH THAT'S GOING PLACES...** because it is a book about that, maybe *not always literally* but we should be growing – **going places spiritually in our walk with the Lord**. Becoming more Christlike – purer, wiser, stronger, gentler.¹ But we should also be busy about His business and doing good deeds. **Good works require us to get out there, outside the church doors**. I think this book is going to bring the perfect balance we need coming off of Galatians. Galatians was all about bad works like the works of the flesh or the works of the Law... it was the book that said stop working! But Titus is all about **when works are good!** ...it is the book that says get to work! Do good deeds! Titus wants us going places for Him, bearing fruit. That's why the background I've chosen is a cobblestone/Roman road. It's a reminder for us to get out there and serve – to create some lasting roads out of the church doors into people's lives who don't know Christ.

And I don't even know where the question came up or who said it, but the question that has been slow-cooking in my mind is the question, “Would our community miss us if we weren't here?” If this church folded in on itself, for whatever reason, “Would it make any difference if we weren't here?” I'm not trying to pull emotional strings or anything like that, but it's a pretty sobering question to ask. **Can we be making a bigger difference?** You see, this book is going to challenge us to live out our faith in the church, in the home and in the public realm. And my prayer is that **this study will open our eyes to some creative ways and opportunities through which we can do good works**.

As we make this shift from Galatians to Titus as a church the picture I've had in my mind is a tree.

I. GALATIANS EMPHASIZED ROOTS

Galatians was all about the gospel and **making sure we have our ROOTS dug deep in the gospel of God's grace** in Christ. Without our roots in the gospel and without an understanding of the sufficiency of Christ's work, an individual or a church isn't going anywhere, or at least

anywhere where it will reap an abundant harvest because good works must have the proper motivation if they're going to be accepted in God's eyes. Good works aren't the basis of salvation but the evidence of it and produce of it. Galatians rooted us in that truth and hopefully stabilized us so that we can grow properly. Before a tree grows upward, it must grow downward. Down below ground in the roots is where it gets life from, the water and nutrients and stability to be able to produce anything above ground. When you first plant a tree in the ground, it doesn't look like it's doing a whole lot for a couple years. I planted a few trees last fall and this fall they look exactly the same. Does that mean they didn't do anything this year? Does that mean they didn't grow? No. I know they're actually doing a lot! You just can't see it! They're establishing its roots so they can eventually produce fruit.

My prayer for Galatians was like Paul's in Ephesians 3:17 – "that Christ may dwell in [our] hearts through faith; and that [we] being ROOTED and GROUNDED in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that [we] may be filled up to all the fullness of God." We should be rooted and grounded in Christ's knowledge-surpassing, inseparable love. I also think of Colossians 2:6-7, which says, "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been FIRMLY ROOTED and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with thankfulness." Now that we are firmly rooted in Him, we can be built up, bearing fruit.

II. TITUS EMPHASIZES FRUIT.

Not just fruit of the Spirit but fruit as in good works. It's mostly about **developing an effective and persevering, fruit bearing church**. What I want to be our memory verse from Titus is 3:14: "**Our people must learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.**" And the church today in this modern culture needs this message desperately. This world wants us to spend all of our free time on ourselves: living for ourselves and spending on ourselves. But Christ wants us investing in His work and in other people. He invested His life in us so that we would invest our lives in others and it's hard to make that gap sometimes from talk to walk. Martin Luther King Jr. said: "One of the great tragedies of life is that men seldom bridge the gulf between practice and profession, between doing and saying... On the one hand, we proudly profess certain sublime and noble principles, but on the other hand, we sadly practice the very antithesis of these principles. How often our lives are characterized by a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds." Titus is here to rid us of that anemia of good deeds. Memorize 3:14 and make it your life during this study. Get good works worked into your mind and into your life. **DO NOT LET YOURSELF MAKE IT THROUGH TITUS WITHOUT DOING GOOD DEEDS**. Look for ways to apply it and then do it. A life that understands grace is a life should be extending it to others. A life that knows the love of Christ should reach out with Christ's love.

Now we look at some more formal reason to study this epistle and get into the background of it.

III. REASONS TO STUDY TITUS.

A. Titus is in the Bible!

The Bible is God's written Word. It is His revelation to man. From cover to cover, God wants us to know it. It's ALL inspired by Him and profitable for instruction and training in righteousness so that we will be equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God wants us to have a working knowledge of His Word and Titus is part of it.

B. Titus gives us divine instruction for organized church leadership.

Titus is after all 4 of the books starting with “T” (Thess./Tim.) but before the “coffee” section (Hebrews). It’s between tea and coffee. 1:4-5 says “To Titus, my true child in a common faith; Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.” In a world of chaos and on a disorderly party island like Crete, the church needs organization and godly leadership, and Titus’ job is to help these churches develop their leadership. Paul wrote this epistle approximately 63-66 AD to one of his sons in the faith named Titus, who was a young pastor on the **Mediterranean island of Crete**. It is an epistle or letter but specifically classified as a **pastoral letter**, along with 1 and 2 Timothy because they are written to pastors. It was written to strengthen him and encourage him and instruct him in how to go about organizing the church. The church is an organism, but it also better have some organization. God is a God of order. And in order to maintain order, the churches need qualified elder/overseers. If these fledgling churches are going to get off the ground and fly they are going to need able leadership first. **A church that’s “going places” needs some competent leaders who don’t “go” anywhere and are there for the long haul.** His job is to appoint elders in the churches.

This letter from Paul to Titus would set Titus apart for this work and be proof of his authority to come in and do it. And I don’t think this would be much of a problem for most believers on the island (except maybe for the false teachers) because **Titus has been with Paul through thick and thin since the first missionary journey** where Paul probably witnessed to him and began to disciple him. Paul calls him ‘my true child in the common faith’. We know that he was a **faithful** man – he could be trusted with finances (2 Cor. 8:6). We know that he was also a **hard worker** for the Lord. Paul called him a “partner and fellow worker” (2 Cor. 8:23) who was even willing to serve in the unruly churches of Corinth and help set them in order, and if he could survive Corinth, he could survive Crete.

If you remember Galatians 2:1-3, Titus was the Greek, Gentile convert Paul and Barnabas took with them to the Jerusalem Council as a test-case for being someone who knew the grace of God and yet was uncircumcised. And just like at the Jerusalem Council where they dealt with the legalism, and just like in Galatia, the Cretan churches had their legalistic teachers as well so we’ll see a bit of that here again. Titus and the newly appointed elders would be required to stand up against false teaching and silence it but it’s not Titus’ first rodeo so he would be capable of dealing with it.

C. Titus is written to develop godly, effective individual believers & churches.

Just because it is written to a pastor, doesn’t mean it’s written only to him. It’s a letter *to* him *for* the churches. He would have taken this letter from city to city and church to church on the island of Crete to give them the apostolic instruction they needed and probably hadn’t known. The way these churches got their start was probably just from those who were converted at Pentecost in Acts 2 and then returned home. These converts probably went home and started sharing telling people about everything that happened with Christ and disciples were being made, but they never really had apostolic leadership. Christians gatherings and groups were meeting regularly across the island in the cities but they were never really got established or became organized churches. They were **fledgling churches**.

They were young, immature, unorganized. They weren't "going places" but were still kind of hanging out in the nest. They needed some help.

Being an island out of the way, they never received the apostolic care of those churches on the mainland and so they were in dire need of some guidance. The only time we really ever see Paul touch down on Crete is for a brief time in Acts 27:9, when they were trying to sail under the shelter of Crete (it is **a mountainous island** that would've blocked the wind and a warmer climate on the south side). The crew Paul was with landed at Fair Havens, but it wasn't suitable for wintering so they thought they'd go a little further down to Pheonix but a powerful storm called a Euraquilo ended up taking them past it and then ended up on Malta, just south of Italy/Sicily. Most don't think this brief touchdown in Fair Havens was where Paul left Titus but must have occurred sometime later after his first imprisonment. But there were Christians on this island and they needed direction and reproof. Titus 1:1 talks about "the truth which is according to **godliness.**" **Mark that word godliness for Titus because Paul's going to explain it to us.** Godliness means to be God-like, like-God.

The island of Crete was anything but godly; beautiful place but ungodly. **Crete is one of the largest islands in the Mediterranean**, fifth largest behind Corsica, Sicily, Cyprus, and Sardinia. 88th largest island in the world with over 630,000+ people today. It is the largest *Greek* island and it separates the Aegean Sea of Greece/Turkey from the Libyan Sea of North Africa. It is the southernmost major island in Europe, about 150 miles long and around 30 miles wide with tons of beaches. It is famous for its beaches, especially 2 pink sand beaches. It has Europe's largest palm tree forest, is known for olive oil and wine, and there aren't any harmful animals because rumor has it, "Hercules" exterminated all the harmful beasts. This place is an absolute paradise. The culture was a party culture. It's hard to find a paradise in this world that's pure. One man said the only reason to go to Crete is to eat, drink and soak in the immorality. It was a lazy culture and a gluttonous culture. Titus 1:12-13 nutshells the culture, saying, "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." And this testimony is true. For this reason, reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith." Paul said the testimony is true! The joke is that *the only beasts on the island were the people!*

I don't remember what commentator pointed this out to me years ago, but it's pretty interesting how some of the most beautiful places in the world tend to draw the most wickedness. That seems to be the case here, just like with Sodom and Gomorrah. They used to be beautiful places. If you remember, Abraham and Lot both had livestock and they had so much that they actually had to split up. So Abraham basically said to Lot, if you go right, I'll go left. If you go left, I'll go right. It says, "Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere – this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah – like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar. So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents, as far as Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord." When I think of Crete, I think of beautiful place, a paradise, but a pretty wicked place.

The religious climate in Crete I think gives us some insight into their lying tongues. According to Diodorus, a Greek historian of the time, Crete claimed to be the birthplace of Zeus and other Greek gods, who started out as a men and women and worked their way to godhood. Zeus was born in Crete but dwelt on Mt. Olympus in mainland Greece with the other gods. So this was a religiously arrogant place full of mythology. This Cretan Zeus was a kingly, lying, womanizer. In fact, this is how messed up the religious climate was: Diodorus (4.9.3) tells the story of Zeus trying but failing to seduce a woman (Alcmene), so he resorts to deceitfully assuming the form of her husband (Amphitryon). When that's your god, and what you consider cardinal virtue, it's no wonder why they lied the way they did. So you can see why in 1:2, Paul makes mention of the fact that God cannot lie. Zeus is the perfect backdrop for exalting the One True God. It's **Mt. Olympus with the lying Zeus god vs. Mt. Zion with the One True God who cannot lie.**

When you study this culture and religious climate, the book makes a lot more sense. Paul wants Titus to straighten the churches out on the island so that they'll counteract that culture. To be frank, he doesn't want them sitting around like a bunch of lying, self-servient, lazy gluttons. He wants them zealous for good works and good deeds – busy doing the Lord's business. He wants godly churches and that's emphasized in 2 major areas.

1. Personal Morality

On an island like Crete, a little character's going to stand out. These Cretans who had placed their faith in Christ weren't to act like Cretans anymore. Our lives should line up with and be fitting for sound doctrine (2:1-15). If sound doctrine is a gear, and our lives are a blank piece of iron, we are to cut and chisel away at our iron pieces so that they become **a gear that lines up with the gear of sound doctrine.** Our lives should revolve around and honor the Word of God. They should line up. What you do should line up with what you believe. This issue is heavily stressed in Titus. One man said, "Nowhere else does Paul more forcefully urge the essential connection between evangelical truth and the purest morality."² Gordon Fee wrote, "The dominant theme in Titus... is good works, that is, exemplary Christian living for the sake of outsiders."³ Another man said, "Paul knew that the saving truth of the gospel message falls on deaf ears when those proclaiming it live ungodly lives that show no evidence of redemption. When Christians live in open sin, they can hardly expect unbelievers to heed a message that purports to save men from sin."⁴ As we'll see, it's God's grace teaches us to deny worldiness and ungodliness, living sensibly – to adorn the doctrine of saving grace by living lives worthy of it, and we are too.

2. Public Life

God wants His people to be fruitful and represent His goodness to all men in the public sphere of life through persevering in good deeds. We see this namely in chapter 3, but also all throughout the book. "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men."

- a. We are to be **fit** for good deeds. (1:16)
- b. An **example** in good deeds. (2:7)
- c. **Zealous** for good deeds. (2:14)

- d. **Ready** for good deeds. (3:1)
- e. Remember the **proper motivation** for good deeds. (3:5)
- f. Be careful to **engage** in good deeds. (3:8)
- g. To **learn** to meet pressing needs. (3:14)

D. Titus teaches us key doctrines.

Here's a few of them I noticed:

1. The Trinity – there is a definite emphasis on the Trinity in this book and seeing the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit all involved in the salvation process.
2. Church organization – Paul clearly expresses the need for church leadership/overseers to keep us focused on the right things, exhorting us to sound doctrine and sound living.
3. Progressive Sanctification – the emphasis in this book is on how to live in accordance with the truth and the grace you received.
4. Immanency of the Lord's Return – We see some immanency here, living in light of an imminent return of the Lord. When you're constantly looking for His return it has a purifying effect on you. No one wants to be living in sin when He appears.
5. Evangelism – maintaining a soul-winning, evangelistic mindset in the public arena.

I believe this book is going to change lives in this church and outside of it. I believe souls will be saved and rewards will be reaped as a result of us studying this book and applying it. It's going to help us "go places" for the Lord and get serious about living for Him in a day in age where passivity and selfishness and cowardice tend to rule. I'm excited to see how the Lord uses this important and relevant epistle in our lives. **When you have a church that's committed to sound doctrine and sound living like Titus teaches us, that's a church that's going places for the Lord.** This week I encourage you to read this letter through and to memorize 3:14 "Our people must **learn** to engage in good deeds, to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful." – basically, learn to be like Christ.

¹ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, Volume 11* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 279.

² D. Edmond Hiebert.

³ Gordon Fee.

⁴ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Titus* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1996), xi.