Eternal Life: Stepping into the Eternal Work of God

Faith, knowledge and hope – and a promise made before the ages began

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, July 19, 2020
PASSAGES	Titus 1:1-5; Galatians 2:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8; 1 John 2:2; John 8:44; Acts 15
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:00:00 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Before Paul tells Titus what to set in order on Crete, he gives him the big picture. The Christian faith is the faith of God's elect, the knowledge of the truth that produces godliness, and the hope of eternal life – promised by the God who never lies, before the ages began, and made known through the preaching of his word. When we share the gospel, we step into God's eternal work. And it is a common faith: it saves apostles and wastrels on the same footing.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Knowing the ultimate purpose of a task changes how you do it: you are not just laying bricks, you are building a cathedral. For Paul, the purpose is eternal life.
- Titus was no freckle-faced beginner but a substantial, trusted coworker. The faith is passed on most often through mentoring, one to one.
- Only God knows who the elect are. We find out after someone says yes to Jesus.
- Christianity is an intellectual faith as well as a heart faith – a settled truth that holds when emotions rise and fall.
- The gospel is a proclamation, not a question. It is true and done whether or not anyone receives it, which takes the pressure off us.

- True teaching produces godliness. If a teacher's life is ungodly, walk away.
- Eternal life was promised by the God who never lies, before creation – a check drawn on eternity past, signed in the blood of Jesus.

▶ 0:55:35

Geno began a series on Titus, a small letter near the back of the New Testament, with a story. Three men were laying bricks. Asked what he was doing, the first said, "Laying bricks." The second: "Building a wall." The third stepped back and said, "I'm building a cathedral."

The cathedral

▶ 0:56:30

Having a vision of the purpose of what we do matters when we try to do something important for Christ. At the very start of Titus, Paul sets out God's ultimate purpose for the work on Crete, and, as Geno said he would repeat all morning, that purpose is eternal life. The opening is a typical greeting – Paul to Titus, greetings – but inside it is a description of the faith itself.

▶ 0:57:57

> "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, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior; to Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior."
>
> TITUS 1:1–4 ↗

"A long run-on sentence," Geno called it, and a beautiful one.

Paul and Titus

▶ 0:59:08

It is called a book, but it is really a letter. We first meet Titus when Paul went to Jerusalem to defend his gospel of freedom: that Gentiles need not become Jews to be saved in Christ. Some early Jewish believers insisted otherwise, and the dispute was settled at the council in Acts 15.

> "Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek."
>
> GALATIANS 2:1–3 ↗

▶ 1:01:25

Paul talked privately with the most influential – "a smooth operator," Geno said, who knew how to get things done. And he brought Titus, an uncircumcised Greek, probably because he was such fine evidence that the gospel bore real fruit among Gentiles. Later Paul trusted him with the great collection from the Greek-speaking churches for starving Jewish believers in Judea (2 Corinthians 8), cut off from other support for following Christ. "The dude was substantial."

▶ 1:03:36

> "This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you."
>
> TITUS 1:5 ↗

The aging apostle saw Titus as a trustworthy coworker with spiritual maturity and wisdom – not "some young guy, freckle-faced, just out of seminary."

A plea for mentoring

▶ 1:04:39

Here Geno paused for a plea. Hope has people with years in Christ – who have raised children or built careers – and young people who would love to be mentored but are a little afraid to ask. So: young people, find someone with some gray hair and ask, "Would you mentor me?" Older ones, pray about it, then say yes, or at least try it for two or three months. Preaching is an efficient way to talk to many people, "but it really doesn't create Christians." One-on-one relationships, where we talk heart to heart, do. It can even be peer to peer.

▶ 1:07:19

Don't wait for the older person to come to you – "Hey, I'd like to mentor you" would be terribly awkward. Ask, and sign up for sixty days, not a year, over Zoom or FaceTime if need be. As the

pandemic stretched on, Geno suspected this might become the main way forward for both evangelism and developing leaders.

▶ 1:08:14

Paul calls himself a servant, *doulos*, and an apostle, *apostolos*, one sent with a message. As one writer put it, *doulos* speaks of Paul's obligation to preach the gospel and *apostolos* of his authority to preach it. "My true child" likely means Titus was a chip off the old block, able to represent Paul's teaching faithfully – and the letter also gave Titus authority in the eyes of the Cretan churches.

1. The faith of God's elect

▶ 1:10:49

Geno had the room repeat three words: faith, knowledge, hope. Faith is trust, and what we trust is the good news that God set out to gather for himself, for all eternity, people from every tongue, tribe, people and nation, ransoming them through the blood of his Son.

▶ 1:13:00

He did not want to wander into predestination. Here "elect" means all who belong to God in Christ – and only God knows who they are. If a teacher claims the elect are those baptized in his water, or from a certain school, or holding a certain set of doctrines, do not believe it. "We only know after they say yes to Jesus." When someone says, "That makes sense – how do I receive Jesus?" you pray together and conclude, "You must be among the elect."

2. Knowledge of the truth that accords with godliness

▶ 1:14:37

Geno found it comforting that the faith is described as knowledge of the truth. "The Christian faith is an intellectual faith. Never let anyone tell you different." It engages heart and mind. If Christianity were merely emotional, losing the emotion would mean losing the faith, and people wear out that way. Instead there is a settled body of truth that can be taught and grasped, a foundation when emotions are up and when they are down.

▶ 1:16:24

What must we know? At least this: Jesus lived a perfect life and offered it on the cross as a ransom, his blood offered as the high priest once offered blood on the Day of Atonement. He paid the price we owed for offending the majesty of God and turned away his anger – "he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

▶ 1:17:39

And that is proclamation, not a question. "God did this in Christ. That's the end of the story." Whether you receive it or not, it is true and it has been done. That takes the pressure off believers to "seal the deal." When a friend says, "I don't believe it," it should not shake us: "I'm sorry you don't believe it. It's been very helpful to me. But it's the truth."

▶ 1:20:25

"Which accords with godliness" is hard to translate, but the sense is that the truth is itself godly, and when taken in it produces godly fruit. Paul is cutting against people on Crete who talked a great deal about spiritual things while their lives were a wreck, producing more wrecked lives. A teacher need not be perfect – "God knows I'm not." But if you discover a teacher's life is ungodly, "you must walk away." Know the lives of your teachers, Geno said, including his: talk to his wife, find his kids, ask the people who watch him all the time.

3. The hope of eternal life

▶ 1:22:56

This is the capstone, the end game. God is happy to have a church in every town on Crete, but what he cares about is the gospel being preached and received, and a heaven populated with his people. And the hope is solid for four reasons.

▶ 1:24:00

It was promised by the God who never lies. Jesus called the devil the father of lies (John 8:44); Paul trusts the God who cannot. Geno cited a study claiming people lie about 1.65 times a day – he was not sure what 0.65 of a lie is – which makes us more like the father of lies than we would like. "Let us strive to be like the one and not like the other." We can take what God says to the bank.

▶ 1:25:37

It was promised before the ages began – before he spun the stars into existence or breathed life into Adam, he had in mind people from every tribe with him forever. "A promise is the expression of purpose," one writer said. Whenever someone says yes to Christ, Geno said, they are "cashing a check drawn on the bank of eternity past," signed by God in the blood of Jesus.

▶ 1:27:17

It is manifested in his word, and **made known through preaching** – which includes simply sharing person to person. So sharing the good news is stepping into the eternal purposes of God, through workers Hope sends to other lands and through conversations with friends, even when we are rejected.

And the message is so alive that wherever it is shared, in language after language, the church springs up.

A call from Beijing

▶ 1:29:32

The night before, one of Geno's Chinese friends from his years with PhD students at UT called from the Bay Area and asked him to talk with a medical student in Beijing. When she left for college, her newly converted mother had slipped a New Testament into her bag. She tossed it in a closet. In her third year, struggling with insomnia and depression, she pulled it out and started at Matthew, and found that as she read she had peace and slept better. She kept reading, found a radio preacher from Taiwan, then a Bible study, and became a Christian.

▶ 1:32:18

Her question: should she quit medical school to serve Jesus? Here was an English-speaking pastor in Central Texas, a bilingual friend in California, and a young woman in Beijing, across culture, time zones and language. "That's the eternal nature of the gospel that we preach." Geno admitted he did not know the answer, talked with her about discerning God's will, and told her of a young man Hope sent overseas as a worker who decided to become a doctor. "You're a doctor; you want to be a worker."

A common faith

▶ 1:34:34

Finally: "my true child in a common faith." Not "our" faith, but "a" faith – bigger than both of them, orthodox and outside them, received by both. They are saved in the same way, by the same sacrifice, and it is the only faith for all people. One writer said that "apostles themselves are saved on the same footing as pariahs and wastrels." Another, that this faith is common to Paul the Jew and Titus the Gentile.

▶ 1:36:18

It does not matter who your parents were, how poor or broken you are, what sins you have committed or how far from God you feel. "The faith that is common to all of us saves all of us, regardless of background and regardless of brokenness." The God who desired you from eternity past has done everything to call you home, and "today is a good day to join Christ, to join the common faith." Geno prayed in thanks for a gospel that sets people from every background on solid ground, and for salvation, hope and healing for anyone listening who was far away.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Titus 1:1–4
- Acts 15:1–29
- Galatians 2:1–3
- 2 Corinthians 8:16–24
- Titus 1:5
- 1 John 2:2
- John 8:44

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. In your work, family or church life right now, are you “laying bricks” or “building a cathedral”? What would help you see the bigger purpose?
2. Who has mentored you in the faith, and whom could you ask – or offer – to meet with for the next sixty days?
3. Geno called the gospel a proclamation, not a question. How would that change the way you talk about Jesus with a friend who doesn’t believe?
4. Why does it matter that true teaching “accords with godliness”? How do you weigh the teachers you listen to?
5. What does it mean to you that eternal life was promised before the ages began, and that the common faith saves everyone on the same footing?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt is Hope Chapel’s senior pastor. Over the years he has befriended Chinese PhD students at the University of Texas, some of whom remain close friends, and he began this series on Titus in the summer of 2020 while Hope met outdoors, indoors and online.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zu240RAVCtE&t=0s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.