Titus 2:11-15 Grace and Glory of God

Two appearings, one long wait, and what grace does with us in between

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, August 16, 2020
PASSAGES	Titus 2:11-15; Exodus 12; Exodus 19:5; John 1:29; Matthew 17:1-8; 1 John 2:15-17; Romans 6; James 1
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:55:44 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

We live in the in-between: the grace of God *has appeared* in Jesus, and the glory of God *will appear* when he comes again. Grace does not leave us idle in the wait. It trains us like a parent trains a child – to say no to ungodliness, to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives now, and to be a people eager for good works who will not shrink back.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Paul's exhortation to Titus is built on two appearings. Grace "has appeared" – past tense, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Glory is still to appear – the blessed hope we are waiting for.
- God has not changed his attitude. There is no mean God in the Old Testament and a kind one in the New; his grace was simply shown more clearly in Jesus than anywhere else.
- "Salvation for all people" means all kinds of people. Nobody is beyond the reach of grace while they are alive, and believers have no right to give up on anyone.
- The blessed hope is not only that Jesus returns but that we will finally see his glory – the glory three disciples glimpsed on the mountain of transfiguration.
- The word for "training" is the word for raising a child. Grace is forming character, not filling heads; more knowledge alone just makes a bad person with more knowledge.
- Verse 14 is an Exodus story: the lamb who gave himself, the ransom that buys slaves out of captivity, the cleansing that makes a treasured people.

- A redeemed people are zealous for good works. In a strange season and an angry culture, the call is to do good, bear witness, and let no one disregard you.

▶ 0:55:44

It was a 100-degree August Sunday in 2020, the church had been back in the room for a few months, and the City of Austin had just extended its lockdown orders through December. Geno admitted the news had discouraged him. "Does anybody remember February?" he asked. It had been five months since anyone could move about freely, and he guessed – while insisting he was no prophet – that normal would be pushed out further still.

Suspended between two comings

▶ 0:58:31

That sense of a never-ending wait, of looking toward a normal that keeps receding, was his way into the text. As Christians we are always living in an in-between time: between Jesus' first advent at Christmas and his second, when he returns in glory to take his people home. Paul's letter to Titus is an exhortation about how to live in exactly that gap.

▶ 0:59:14

He asked the room to listen for the first appearing, the grace of God, and the second, the glory of God, because together they give the passage its structure – and had the congregation say the key phrase back to him: *has appeared*. Past tense.

> "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ…"
>
> TITUS 2:11–13 ↗

▶ 1:00:58

"We are living in the era of the now and the not yet," Geno said. We have received the grace that appeared in Jesus, and we are looking for the blessed hope he promised.

1. The grace of God has appeared

▶ 1:01:29

What does it mean that grace "appeared"? It refers to everything about the life of Jesus – his ministry, teaching, healing and deliverance, and supremely his death on the cross for the sins of humanity and his resurrection from the grave. Geno reached for the Greek word behind "appeared": *epiphany*. Something invisible is made visible; something unseen can suddenly be seen.

▶ 1:02:40

That does not mean God was graceless until Bethlehem. Grace is the core of his nature, the attribute that leans in favor toward his people, and it has always been his attitude. "There's no such thing as a mean old nasty God in the Old Testament and a beautiful, lovely, winsome God in the New," Geno said. "There's no two different gods in the Bible. That's very poor theology." What changed is that grace was shown forth in Jesus more clearly than it had ever been shown anywhere else.

▶ 1:04:21

He found that a comfort, because we really are wayward, broken, sometimes disappointing people, and God has poured out on us unearned favor and rich mercy. He asked a question he says he asks often at Hope: have you ever needed mercy? Ever hurt someone so badly you could not get back into their graces unless they opened the door? It is not yours to make happen. "God has given us mercy in Jesus Christ" – profound forgiveness and, ultimately, restoration, completely undeserved.

2. Salvation for all kinds of people

▶ 1:05:34

Sin wreaks havoc in every life and in every system people run. So when Paul says grace brings salvation "for all people," lift your eyes to the whole world: all kinds of people, slave and free, male and female – and, Geno went on, the sex worker, the human trafficker, the drug dealer, "whatever category you find despicable or despised."

▶ 1:06:51

"Nobody is beyond the grace of God, not one person," he said. "It's not too late as long as they're alive. No one is so reprobate that the grace of God cannot reach them – and we as believers in Jesus Christ have no right whatsoever to give up on anybody."

3. The blessed hope: glory still to appear

▶ 1:07:53

Verse 13 uses the same word for the second pole: "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior." Many of us hear only "the return of Jesus." True, Geno said, but the hope is the appearing of the *glory* – and that is not splitting hairs. Just as the God of all grace made himself visible in Jesus, the God of all glory will one day make himself known in his appearing.

▶ 1:09:10

Jesus is already dwelling in glory, and the Gospels give us a crack in the facade: the transfiguration. Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain, and suddenly his brightness appeared, and Moses and Elijah were there with him. The three were "frightened out of their skulls": the Jesus they ate meals with was brighter than the sun. In the incarnation that majesty was hidden in a baby in a manger, so that he could dwell with us without our being afraid.

▶ 1:10:51

"Dearly beloved, he's always glorious, always," Geno said. "And this glory that will appear is just us seeing him finally as he really is." Unseen, then seen. Hidden, then revealed. We live between grace and glory, and there is tension in that.

4. Grace is raising us

▶ 1:11:38

So what do we do in the in-between? The grace that has appeared is "training us." Of the several Greek words for education, Paul chose one tied to *paideia*, the raising of children. That does not mean we are children, said Geno, who has raised two into adulthood. It means grace works the way a good parent does – deciding what kind of person this child should become, guiding, shaping attitudes and skills as well as knowledge.

▶ 1:12:36

Our classroom model – knowledge into heads – is not the center of this word. It is closer to holding a child and guiding them forward to maturity. That is what grace is doing all the time, through the ministry of Jesus and the Holy Spirit he has given to be our teacher.

▶ 1:13:49

And here, Geno said, Western Christianity gets it wrong every time: if I just know more, use bigger theological words, learn Greek, then I'll be a better person. "You're just a bad person with more knowledge," he said. "Education doesn't make you a better person." Grace moves us toward moral purity, toward attitudes that bring glory to God, toward behavior that is sacrificial and wonderful to behold.

5. Renounce, then live

▶ 1:14:23

The passage has two infinitives: *to renounce* and *to live*. We renounce two things. First, ungodliness – a broad term for anything against God or his ways. What is on that list? "Make your own list," Geno said. "You and the Holy Spirit can make a list better than I could." Whatever moves you away from God belongs on it. He has his own, he added – "and I'm not going to share my list with you unless you take me to coffee and you first share yours with me."

▶ 1:15:34

Second, worldly passions: the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:15–17) – sensuality, sinful impulses, cravings, addictions. Renouncing them is ongoing. The passions that are hardest at twenty-five are not the ones that are hardest later. "Sixty-five is a different kind of challenge than twenty-five," he said. "Oh Geno, this is never ending? Yes, it's never ending. It is better and it gets easier, but it is never ending – nor should it be," not until he returns and we see him as he is.

▶ 1:16:35

Then grace trains us to live **self-controlled** (how you deal with worldly passions), **upright** (honesty, good character, walking in the truth) and **godly** – the reversal of the ungodliness we renounce.

▶ 1:17:05

Geno quoted one writer who called godliness Paul's general term for what it means to be a Christian. "I was immediately convicted by that – oh, ouch," he said. Everyone who names the name of Christ should be a godly person. And Paul says "in the present age." Can we really live godly lives now? "It wouldn't be there if we couldn't do it," Geno answered. Maybe not completely, maybe not perfectly, but qualitatively, yes – we can live like God in this life.

▶ 1:18:21

None of this is how we earn anything. "We are to live godly lives, but only he can ransom us and make us his own," he said. Our living good lives is a response to his good work on our behalf.

6. The Savior who gave himself: an Exodus story

▶ 1:19:08

"Our great God and Savior" puts the weight on rescue – from slavery to sin into relationship with Christ. And the phrases of verse 14, Geno said, all reach back to Israel's redemption out of Egypt.

> "...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."
>
> TITUS 2:14 ↗

▶ 1:19:48

He gave himself for us. At the tenth plague a lamb was killed and its blood painted on the doorframe, so that the angel of death passed over that house (Exodus 12). So when John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," his hearers knew exactly what he meant. Jesus gave up his life that we might be set free – "the blood of that lamb painted on the doorframe of our own hearts, so that we would not die for our sins but would have eternal life."

▶ 1:21:42

To redeem us from all lawlessness. Ancient conquerors took a defeated nation's women and children as slaves, and those slaves could be bought back. The price was the *ransom*; buying them back was *redemption*.

▶ 1:23:43

That is our story too, Geno said, the story told in Romans 6 and James 1. Temptation comes, something in us answers yes, and we tell ourselves we are still captain of our destiny. But every yes makes the next easier, until we cannot say no any longer. "That time comes pretty quickly," he warned. "It's not a long time. And then we are slaves, and we need someone to pay the ransom price." Then, gently: "Your lawlessness may be a little different than mine, but yours is covered, as is mine. Isn't that wonderful?"

▶ 1:24:54

To purify for himself a people. Out of slavery, we are still tainted by the sin we were in. The ransom that brings us out – the shed blood of Jesus, his life, because the life is in the blood – also cleanses us morally in the sight of God. We are seen in the light of his purity.

▶ 1:26:56

A people for his own possession. The phrase translates the "treasured possession" of Exodus 19. Slaves brought out, purified, made the people of God: that is what it means to call Jesus our Savior: he has already saved us, and we are waiting for him to return.

7. Zealous for good works – and not shrinking back

▶ 1:27:30

The last phrase of verse 14 rules out a church that sits around taking it easy until Jesus appears. A people for his possession are "zealous for good works" – full of eager desire to do good and sacrificial things for the sake of other people. When someone asks why, Geno said, we can answer naturally: "I'm doing something practical to show the love of God." And if people think the hope of his appearing sounds crazy, say it another way: "I'm so hopeful because he is so good."

▶ 1:28:43

Then Paul turns to Titus himself:

> "Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you."
>
> TITUS 2:15 ↗

▶ 1:29:12

Titus faced false teachers, and Paul tells him not to be timid: you have the truth, so stand up – not as a shrinking violet, but in a mature, godly way.

▶ 1:29:57

Geno applied it to a season that, for his generation, was the strangest thing they had faced in a long while. "We shouldn't be sitting around," he said. "We should be doing good works, and we should be bearing witness to Christ whenever, wherever, however. We should not be shrinking back."

▶ 1:30:33

He knew what that looked like online. "It's a flame-throwing war out there on social media," he said. "Be a person of grace. Tell the truth. Stand your ground." You cannot control whether others disregard you, so do what is yours to do: walk with confidence, speak the truth, tell your story, bear witness to God – "then let it lie, and let the Holy Spirit take it." That, he said, is how to live in the present age: do good works, bear witness, let no one disregard you.

▶ 1:31:04

He closed in prayer for courage and discernment to speak the truth in love and be winsome – to bear witness so that people would say, "Can we talk offline? Can I give you a phone call?"

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Titus 2:11–13
- Matthew 17:1–8
- 1 John 2:15–17
- Titus 2:14
- Exodus 12
- John 1:29
- Romans 6
- James 1
- Exodus 19:5
- Titus 2:15

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Geno compared the long wait for “normal” in 2020 to the Christian life between Christ’s two comings. Where do you feel that in-between tension most right now?
2. Why does it matter to you that God’s grace was not new in Jesus, only more clearly seen? How might it change the way you read the Old Testament?
3. “Nobody is beyond the grace of God.” Who is the person, or the kind of person, you are most tempted to give up on?
4. If grace trains us the way a parent raises a child rather than the way a classroom fills heads, what is it shaping in you at this stage of life, and what is on the list you and the Holy Spirit would make?
5. What is one practical good work, or one conversation where you need to stop shrinking back, that you will take up this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt was introduced at this service as Hope Chapel’s pastor. He preached this message on Titus 2 in August 2020, when the church had resumed meeting in person, indoors and out, under Austin’s extended restrictions. In it he mentions having raised two children into adulthood and, at sixty-five, finding that the struggle with worldly passions changes with age rather than ending.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Un2ZBfU6I5w&t=3344s

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.