Titus 3:1-8 Heirs of the Hope of Eternal Life – An Unclouded Fellowship with God

Six things to know about our great salvation, and how it makes us good neighbors

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, August 23, 2020
PASSAGES	Titus 3:1-8; Matthew 13:44; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Matthew 19:28; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Acts 2
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:47:51 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The gospel is fundamental, so we should know it with some exactness, and here Paul gives it whole: we were slaves; God's goodness and loving kindness came after us; his mercy, not our merit, is the ground of it; the Holy Spirit washes and renews us; we are made heirs of eternal life; and good works are the evidence. People saved like that become courteous, gentle neighbors who do the world good.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Christians owe outsiders submission to rightful authority, readiness for good works, and courtesy: speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, go high when others go low.
- Paul puts himself in the dark basket – "we ourselves were once foolish." So no one is beyond hope, we should not point fingers, and we should lead with our own weakness.
- The source of salvation is God's goodness, "the spontaneous disposition to bless" – the way a healthy parent smiles at a small child who is not even behaving.
- Mercy means God does not give us what we have richly earned. It is God reaching toward us, not us reaching up to him.

- "God has not repaired us, but made us new." Regeneration is the new birth; renewal is the ongoing renovation of the divine image, worked by the Spirit and dramatized in baptism.
- Justification declares us not innocent but righteous, because the demands of righteousness were met by someone else – and makes us heirs of an unclouded fellowship with God.
- Good works are not the ground of salvation but its necessary fruit. The life of the Spirit is found by those who dare to be actors instead of audience.

▶ 0:47:51

Children had been baptized at the outdoor service that morning, and Geno began by pointing the room to the recordings of their testimonies on Realm. Then he turned to a parable about a man who found treasure in a field (Matthew 13:44) and sold everything he had to buy it, because he saw the treasure was worth his life.

The time for fiddling around is over

▶ 0:49:21

That parable was Jesus pushing his audience to act. "Now Jesus never said 'fiddling around,'" Geno admitted – "that's Central Texas for get on the program." If Jesus has punched your ticket to heaven through his death on the cross, don't dawdle. If the gospel rings in your heart, tell somebody and ask where to go from here – baptism and Bible study come next.

▶ 0:50:26

Ours is a great salvation. But what, exactly, is the gospel? "What do you mean, Mr. Pastor Man?" For Geno, Titus 3:1–8 is one of the clearest explanations in the whole New Testament. "It's fundamental," he said, "and because it's fundamental we should have it down with some exactness."

▶ 0:51:33

> "Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people."
>
> TITUS 3:1–2 ↗

1. Our responsibility to outsiders

▶ 0:53:39

Paul did not want the church on Crete known as a band of rebels. So: be submissive to rulers and authorities. There is a limit, Geno said – whenever the government demands something that belongs only to God, we draw the line and refuse to worship it – "but I will obey where I can." Paul knew that limit firsthand. He was submissive to the authorities all the way to a jail in Rome and, ultimately, execution under Nero.

▶ 0:54:31

Be ready for every good work. Bless your neighbors – go shopping and get them groceries. Why? So that people watching our lives ask what makes us so kind, and we can give the simple answer: "I'm just showing the love of Jesus in a practical way."

▶ 0:55:33

Then show perfect courtesy toward all people: speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, be gentle. "This is kind of the opposite of what a lot of people do on social media," Geno observed. Christians should abstain from hurling curses and epithets at those who offend them. Gentleness, as one writer put it, means not insisting on one's own rights, "but embodying an attitude that quiets personal concerns to make room for the concerns of others."

▶ 0:56:12

With another presidential election coming that fall, he pressed it home: "Christians are to set the standard high when it comes to public discourse. Even if others are going low, those who follow Christ should go high." Substantive, but grace-filled.

2. Our great salvation, in six parts

▶ 0:57:11

For the heart of the passage, Geno borrowed a six-part structure from one of his favorite theologians, John Stott. The **need** for salvation: we are slaves. The **source**: God's goodness and loving kindness. The **ground**, its moral basis: God's mercy. The **means**: the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. The **goal**: eternal life. And the **evidence**: the diligent practice of good works. "Now I could stop right there," he said, "but I am a preacher, and I'm not going to stop right there."

The need: we were slaves

▶ 0:58:53

> "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another."
>
> TITUS 3:3 ↗

▶ 0:59:25

"That, dearly beloved, is a deep, deep picture of darkness." *Foolish* is "the darkening effect of sin on the intellect" – the way heavy drug or alcohol use clouds the brain. *Disobedient* is willful rebellion against God. *Led astray* means deceived by the false guides Paul has been warning Titus about.

▶ 1:01:03

Slaves to various passions and pleasures describes a lifestyle committed to satisfying one sensual desire after another – an addicted life. "You keep going back to it, back to it, back to it. Pretty soon you cannot say no, and that's when the jail cell closes on you."

▶ 1:02:21

Malice and envy is life absorbed in pulling others down – "the put-down has become an art form in our culture." Stott: malice is wishing people evil; envy is resenting and coveting their good. Both break relationships apart, which is the enemy's plan: isolate us so he can destroy us. *Hated by others and hating one another* is the end of the road, a mutual hostility that hastens "the dissolution of the bonds of human society."

▶ 1:04:05

Notice, Geno said, that Paul says *we*. He puts himself in the basket with the Cretans. That means no one is beyond hope. It means we should not point fingers. And it means that when we talk about Christ we should lead with weakness: "I've been in the place where I just got sick of life, and sick of hating my brother, hating my sister – and Christ delivered me from that."

The source: God's goodness and loving kindness

▶ 1:05:27

> "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 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, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."
>
> TITUS 3:4–7 ↗

▶ 1:06:02

Darkness to light, death to life: Paul traces salvation back to the love of God. One ancient writer defined goodness as "the spontaneous disposition to bless." A healthy parent smiles at their small child, "even if the child is not necessarily being all that obedient. It's still your kid." That is God's disposition toward us. "He's not some mean old guy in the sky. He's not Santa Claus either. But his disposition is to offer blessing." Loving kindness adds that even when we are doing wrong, he is still coming after us with a father's love.

▶ 1:08:27

And it *appeared* – last Sunday's word, the invisible made visible in the person and work of Jesus. That is the fountain from which our salvation springs.

The ground: his mercy

▶ 1:08:59

But love is the source, not the moral basis. The ground is a decision: he saved us "according to his own mercy." The gospel emphatically denies that salvation can be reached by human effort or merit.

▶ 1:10:23

If God were only fair, we would be punished for every sin we ever committed. Mercy means he chooses not to give us what we have richly earned. Geno quoted a writer: from the standpoint of human need, Jesus died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3); from the standpoint of God's love, he was crucified because of God's mercy. "Mercy is God reaching toward humankind to put us in relationship with himself – not the reverse."

▶ 1:11:47

He spoke personally here. More than once he has done things that injured others, and the only way to make it right was for them to give him something he could not earn. "There's nothing sweeter that I've discovered than the moment when that person says, you don't deserve this, but I'm going to forgive you."

The means: washed, reborn and renovated

▶ 1:13:09

Regeneration means new birth, and it appears only twice in the New Testament. The new creation of 2 Corinthians 5 carries the idea. Greek writers used *palingenesia* for personal rebirth and for the renewal of all things – Jesus' sense in Matthew 19:28, which Geno promised to return to when he preached on heaven in September. Here it is the renewal of a person. "God has not repaired us, but made us new," wrote one ancient writer. It can feel like patching up, but we have been made new and are on our way to the renewal of everything.

▶ 1:15:31

Renewal is a different word with the emphasis on ongoing renovation – "the process of renovation of the divine image in human beings." The two overlap: "We have been regenerated, and we are being renewed."

▶ 1:16:05

What about the *washing*? Most scholars take it as a reference to baptism, and one stream of the church holds that you cannot be regenerated until you are baptized. Geno does not think that is what Paul means. He sided with Stott: God saved us through a rebirth and renewal "outwardly dramatized in baptism but inwardly effected by the Holy Spirit." The Spirit works in our hearts; the water is the sign.

▶ 1:17:36

And the Spirit was "poured out on us richly," the very language of Pentecost in Acts 2, when the church was born. When the Spirit comes into a life and cleans it up, "it's like we're getting our own private Pentecost."

The goal: heirs of eternal life

▶ 1:19:11

Why would God go to all that trouble? "You might be saying, like I do sometimes in my own pride, well, because I'm worth it." No – so that he could give us eternal life. But Paul first uses another important word: "being justified by his grace."

▶ 1:20:15

To be justified is to be declared righteous and given a standing of acceptance. "I want to be careful here," Geno said – "not innocent, but righteous." Our sins have made us guilty. We are let go because the demands of righteousness have been met by somebody else. It is always God's work, received as a gift: "a judge's declaration resulting in freedom."

▶ 1:22:24

He read an older writer who said justification is more than clearance at the bar of justice: the penalty of the law is fully met, "but the Savior's spotless obedience is also transferred to our account." We are "heirs of eternal life as well as forgiven offenders" – not innocent, just forgiven. He added a little doggerel he credited to Charles Wesley about the mystery of redemption, the Savior's strange design: "man's offense was counted his, ours his righteousness divine." The great trade-off.

▶ 1:22:59

And the inheritance? One writer described eternal life as "unclouded fellowship with God." We have eternal life now, in Christ, but one day the fellowship we have with God through the Spirit will be unclouded.

The evidence: devoted to good works

▶ 1:23:44

> "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."
>
> TITUS 3:8 ↗

▶ 1:24:12

How can we tell if we have genuinely entered this redemption? Simply: the diligent practice of good works. Not one now and then, but a life given to it: "We adorn our salvation with good works." Geno offered three quotes: good works are not the ground of salvation but its necessary fruit; they are the logical outcome of truly grasping grace; and the reality of new life in the Spirit "is discovered only by those who dare to be actors instead of audience."

▶ 1:25:24

Then the curious ending: "excellent and profitable for people." Dull, it might seem – but Paul means it is good for others that we are converted. We exit from hating and speaking ill, and become a positive good in society. "Places where people genuinely are converted in large numbers become wonderful places to live, because the people are walking out their Christian faith."

What do we do about it?

▶ 1:26:22

Geno saw two responses. If you are on the outside looking in, “today is a good day to say yes to Jesus,” to receive the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit and become an heir of eternal life. And if you already belong to Jesus, be renewed in your affection for him, understand the depth of it a little better, and become people eager and devoted to good works – “not always blessing merely Christians, but maybe especially blessing those that are far from the faith.”

▶ 1:27:52

He closed by leading anyone who wanted to come to Christ in a prayer to repeat after him: confessing distance from God and the sin of putting oneself in charge of one’s life, asking forgiveness, and asking to be accepted into the family – “justified freely by your grace, declared righteous” – and thanking Jesus for making them his son or daughter. “What a great day to say yes to Jesus.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Matthew 13:44
- Titus 3:1–8
- Titus 3:1–2
- Titus 3:3
- Titus 3:4–7
- 1 Corinthians 15:3
- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Matthew 19:28
- Acts 2
- Titus 3:8

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Geno said Christians should “go high” in public discourse even when others go low. What would perfect courtesy toward all people look like in your online and political conversations?
2. Which words in Titus 3:3 best describe your own life before Christ, and how might leading with that weakness change the way you talk about him?
3. How does picturing God’s goodness as “the spontaneous disposition to bless,” like a parent smiling at a misbehaving child, challenge the way you expect him to look at you?
4. What is the difference between being declared innocent and being declared righteous, and why does Geno think the difference matters?
5. Who is one person far from the faith you could do practical good for this week, and what would being an “actor instead of audience” look like with them?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt was introduced at this service as Hope Chapel’s pastor. He preached this message from Titus 3 in August 2020, the morning children were baptized at the church’s outdoor service, following his message on Titus 2 the week before. He describes John Stott as one of his favorite theologians and borrowed Stott’s six-part outline of salvation for this talk, and he promised a series on heaven for September.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZre3n_nmoY&t=2871s

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.