

The Lord has burdened our campus pastor, Steve Hardin, to go through the book of Titus with our campus over the month of July. My assignment is to introduce the series through the introduction of the book. Of all the times, the Lord has allowed me to open up and unpack the Scriptures of God to the people of God, there has not been a sermon I have been more excited to preach than this one. Here's why. I have always loved the people of The Village Church. It has always been an ever-increasing love. But over the last couple of months, the Lord has seen fit to drop a couple of bombs in my life. There has been a lot of pain in the last couple of months. There have been a lot of tears for my wife and I in the last couple of months. But on the back side of that He has imparted a love into me for the people of The Village Church like I have never experienced before. So the chance to preach from a book that I love to a people I love is a gift that I don't take for granted. I want to begin by reading you my thesis statement. This is where I want us to go. I love books. I'm a nerd. I like papers and I like to write thesis statements. So as we navigate the Word, it is going to feel kind of like we're hodgepodge a little bit, but that's because we're trying to enter the book and the series and just follow the words of the text. And as we apply those words, I want to do it through this grid. Here's my thesis statement for today. The purpose of Paul's apostleship reveals God's strategy for the redemption of Dallas, which is to build up His church and integrate His people into His city to proclaim His Son.

Let me pray. "Father, we come right now asking that You would send Your Spirit to do only what the Spirit can do. There are no men out there who can preach faith into being, who can give sight to the blind, who can give breath to the dead. That is Your work. We trust You and we ask You to do it for the exaltation of Your Son in this room. We pray in Christ's name. Amen."

Okay, my wife and I have a three month old son, and he has a condition. It's called "chubby cheeks." Last week, we were at church and a good friend of ours came up to my wife and said, "Your son, he's fat." Now this is a reality that I have accepted and embraced, but my wife, not so much. So we get home, I grab his cheeks, I shake them and say, "Look at these fat cheeks." To which she said, "That's not fatness; that's sweetness." Now my wife is willfully blinding herself to the reality that my son's head is as big as mine is. Here's my point. We do the same thing in our lives. We willfully blind ourselves to the state of our heart. We look at sin and call it something else. We look at premarital sex and we call it "love." We exploit people for profit and we call it "business." We blow up at our wife weekly and we call it "leadership." And my hope and prayer is, as we navigate these words, as we walk through the book of Titus, that we would take an honest look at our lives, take an honest stock of who we were in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ and out of that would come transformation and mission to the exaltation of the Son.

So that being said, let's talk Titus. Titus is a book that was written by Paul to a guy named Titus. Paul had planted churches on this island called Crete, and he left Titus to oversee these churches. The religious context of Crete was this. The Cretans believed that Crete was the birthplace of gods and that the worship of gods began on their island. They believe that Zeus, the preeminent man, become god, was born and buried on their island. This was a jacked up people they were going to. And Zeus was known primarily for the seduction of women. And what do we all do when it comes to our idols? We want to live like them. So the island of Crete was a place known for its promiscuity, for its adultery and for its immorality. And this was a day when there was no Internet. It just flowed throughout the known Roman world. This was what this island was known for. It was a highly pagan environment that was infiltrating into the church. Now while this was happening, false teaching had slipped into the church that Paul was going to call Jewish myths and genealogies.

Anytime false teaching, anytime non-gospel centered, non-Christ exalting teaching penetrates a church, the church will eventually either avoid the culture or they will assimilate and live like the culture. What was going on in Crete was they were living like the culture. Paul's attack plan in this letter is first organizational, second theological and third behavioral. The underling theme is not how man becomes God, but how God became man and did so for our redemption and our city's transformation.

So with a context of the letter of Titus set, let's get into the text of Titus. Titus 1:1, "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, . . ." Paul opens this letter with three apostolic titles for himself. Sitting behind each one is a myth that both Christians and non-Christians believe. So I want to take them one at a time and give you the myth, the truth and then I want to prove it from the Scriptures. My prayer and hope in doing it this way is that this would serve as a springboard into the sermon and into the series and that it would guard us from hearing and distorting the message of Titus. So here's the first myth. This is a lie from the mouth of Satan. Myth: For you to belong with Jesus or in the church, you have to have a clean past. Truth: There is no man, no woman or no child whose past is so far gone the grace of God cannot overcome it. Paul, the man who wrote the letter that we're reading, was a man whose zeal for the Law led him to come to gatherings like this, drag us out, have us arrested and have some of us killed. In Acts 7, he's standing there at the stoning of Stephen, our first martyr. In Acts 8, it says he's going house to house ravaging the church. In Acts 9, Christ comes, intervenes and awakens Paul to the majesty of Jesus Christ. His life is transformed and he's converted. I want you to imagine with me what it must have been like the first time Paul sat in a gathering like this. Can you imagine the shame he must have felt? Can you imagine him sitting there going, "If they know a fraction of what I've done, there's no way they would want me in here. How can I look at these men and women and call them brother and sister? I don't belong here"? I have no doubts in a room this size that there are some of you sitting here right now today like Paul and you're going, "If these people knew who I was. . .if they knew about my abortion. . .if they knew about my DUI. . .if they knew about last night, there is no way I belong here." That is a lie from the devil. Some of you are looking around going, "My life is a wreck and these people have it together." No they don't. I'm a pastor at this church, and I'm telling you these people do not have it together. Neither do I. Every one of us is a work in progress, which is why you still see hypocrisy in the person next to you. It's why my wife still sees it in me. Our claim to fame is not perfection. Our claim to fame is that, in our imperfection, the perfect man/God Jesus Christ came and paid for it. At the height of the climax of the redemptive work of Christ, was His rejection for your acceptance. So if you are going to continue to hide and run from the gospel, let's agree on this. It can no longer be because of your past, it can no longer be because of the person next to you and it can no longer be because of the lack of invitation.

Paul's second title is "servant of God." Myth: Christianity is about controlling our behavior because of legalism. Truth: Christianity is not rules to be followed but joy to be found. As we go through Titus, you're going to see a lot of rules. The motivation for those rules is not legalism; it is the incarnation of the Son of God for your redemption. Those rules and that obedience exist to produce joy in your life, to produce sanctification, transformation, likeness with Christ in your life. That's why they're there. I would never want you to take my word for it, so I'm going to Scriptures that speak to it. Flip over to Romans 6. Starting in the middle of verse 19, "For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification." So verse 19 is the "what." Now verse 20 starts the "why." "For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life." So Paul knows that at all times, every one of us is both a slave and free. There are no exceptions to that. We are either slaves of sin or we are slaves of righteousness. And as I studied this text, there were two things that just leapt off the page at me. The first one is the wording "free" in verse 20 and 22. It says "were free" in 20, and it says "set free" in 22. Here's the difference. In verse 20, it's the Greek word *eleutheros*, and in verse 22, it's the verb *eleutheroó*. So verse 20 is a state of being and verse 22 is an action that

was performed for us. So let me translate that. January 7, 1978, I am born a slave into a slavery I don't want. I'm born a slave to sin, free from righteousness. In May of 2000, God intervenes in my life, awakens me to the gospel of Jesus Christ and my slavery is transferred and I'm no longer a slave to sin. I am a slave to God and a slave to righteousness. Which leads to the second thing that caught my attention as I studied this. The second thing was the wording in verse 19. In verse 19 it says, "Lawlessness to lawlessness and righteousness to sanctification." What I couldn't understand was why, if it is lawlessness to lawlessness, is it not righteousness to righteousness? If it's A to A on one side, why is it A to B on the other? The answer is both theological and practical. The answer is this. That "slave of righteousness" in verse 19 is parallel to "slave of God" in verse 22. Our slavery to God is the source of our righteousness, while our slavery to righteousness is the actions that flow from that source. Now here's what that means as it relates to Titus. It is grace filled slavery that motivates, powers and accomplishes sanctification. Our diligent obedience to sit in subjection of the commands and Scriptures of God is an effort to produce sanctification, joy and hope in our life. Our effort is not to earn the favor of God. Our effort is because we have been made slaves of the infinite source of joy in the world. That's why we obey. It's why we strive. The reason this is so important is because when we read Titus, we're going to see a lot of dos and don'ts. And I do not want one person in this room to think that Titus is about legalism, about power, about the church trying to be the man. It's about our slavery to the infinite source of joy. It's about obedience that leads to sanctification that leads to joy that leads to Christ being magnified.

Which leads to the next myth. Paul's last title is "apostle of Jesus Christ." "Apostle" means "sent one." So here's the myth. Myth: The primary way God sends His people is through feelings and emotions. Truth: The primary way God sends His people is through circumstance, and it is in circumstance that He places us where He wants us. Listen to how Paul got to Crete. In Acts 22, you'll find Christ coming to Paul in prayer and saying, "You need to leave Jerusalem. I'm going to send you far away to the Gentiles." And then you find Paul in prison begin bounced from government official to government official until you get to Acts 27 where they decide to ship him across the sea from Jerusalem to Italy. The normal route takes them along the east and north coast of the Mediterranean Sea until you get to Italy. Crete is nowhere near that route and sits right in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. So when they went north and turned west, the winds (who sit in subjection to and obey God) forced them south. They had to go south of Crete and dock on the island of Crete.

Now, I've never met Paul. If I could meet Paul, I'd ask him, "Hey man, did you feel like prison, did you feel like Crete was your calling to missions?" I don't think that Paul would have said yes. I think that Paul would have said, "For the glory of God and the redemption of man, I would have gone anywhere. But no, I didn't feel like prison. I didn't feel like Crete." But God, in His redemptive plan, through prison and through wind, sent Paul to the island of Crete. That was his circumstance. Now here's your circumstance. You live in Dallas, Texas. Love it or hate it, you live in Dallas. I pray you love it, because you have been sent here to love the city to life. We exist, we're here to love this city to life. We are God's redemptive means to extend the gospel of grace, to bring cultural transformation to the city that we live in. And if you don't love the city, I would suggest that you don't then have the heart of God for this city. I'm not talking about thinking downtown is cool. I'm talking about the fact that there are millions of people who bear the image of God living in close geographic proximity to one another. And if that does not stir your heart for this place, then you don't have the heart of God for this place. I would encourage you to begin praying that God would impart into you His heart for this city. I would encourage you to ask Him to give you eyes to see what is not seen. Ask Him to give you eyes beyond the house to the heart. Because it's only in that will we, The Village Church – Northway, linking arms with the rest of the churches in the city, have a truly gospel-centered presence in this city. Because a gospel-centered presence loves the city, is integrated into the city and lives counter-cultural to the city. It's why we're here. And we're going to talk more as we move through the text about this.

Now in the text, Paul is going to give the reason for his apostleship and he's going to give us the reason why myth cannot govern our lives or our churches. So let's keep reading. "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, . . ." Now the first thing I want you to see is, when Paul gets to Crete, there were no believers. There were no believers in Crete when Paul got there. He was sent to the island of Crete to find the elect and to build them up. And I'm going to say to you that we have the same opportunity in Dallas to find the elect and to build them up in their faith. If we don't, if myth governs our lives, if myth governs our church, we will be a welcoming subculture. We will be a culture that is set aside and apart from the rest of the culture and we welcome them and embrace them, but we don't come to them. Or we will assimilate and become like the culture. If either one of those things happen, we are not extending the gospel to them and we're not building them up in their faith. We're just reinforcing who they already are. This is something that I am burdened by and that we cannot afford. Right now, people are moving to cities and to D/FW at unprecedented rates. Right now, one third of the U.S. population lives on 3% of the land. Half of the world's population now lives in cities. As the Lord is sending people our way, we still have the call and command to integrate and incarnate to them, to go to them and find them. Once they're found, our role is to build them up in faith and knowledge. Once we're first converted, all we know is that we love Jesus. We don't know anything else; we just know we love Him and we love Him deeply. But we're not meant to stay that. How do I know that? Because my Bible is 1300 pages of 3pt font. God has revealed the content of our faith in great detail, and we are meant to grow in the knowledge of the content of our faith. This was something that took me years to figure out. I'm eleven years into the faith now. It took me years to grow into this. I watched my buddies who led me to Christ carry around their books that they pretended to read. They thought that by carrying these books, the ladies were going to like them and they'd get dates that may end up becoming wives, which is just a really twisted perversion of your college years. If you think that carrying Wayne Grudem around is going to get you a date, there's a reason that you're single. But I watched them and didn't want to be like them, so I avoided serious study of the Scriptures. I did not know the depth of joy that was to be found. I didn't know the hope that was to be found in pursuing the knowledge of the content of our faith. And this building up of your faith and knowledge is the role of the ministries inside the church. It's why we so aggressively try to push you beyond just Sunday service. We pray by God's grace you would get that here. It's why we want to get you into home groups and into Recovery. Because in there, we want to try to build up your faith, build up your knowledge in a smaller context so that you would then be equipped to go out as men and women who are integrated into the city for the ministry of reconciliation.

Let's keep reading, because what is about to come is frightening. ". . .for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, . . ." Now there is a grammatical question the text is forcing us to ask. I won't bore you with the details, but the question is this. Is faith and knowledge the source of godliness or is godliness the external evidence of faith and knowledge? What's frightening is that the answer is "yes." It's frightening because we live in the Bible Belt. We live in Dallas, Texas, where men and women gather in churches by the thousands to celebrate the truth while many have no evidence of the truth in their lives. It's not uniform, not universal. By the grace of God, many of you don't fit that description, but many of you do. We celebrate weekly truth with no evidence of it in our lives whatsoever. You still think that being in this building is Christianity. You think that being in this room, sitting inside these walls is Christianity. It's not. This does not make you a Christian. Being in this building means you're in this building. It means, by the grace of God, you're getting to sit here listening to somebody talk about the glories of Christ and the gospel that the Father sent Him into the world for your redemption because of His love for you and for His world and how Christ went to the cross as payment for your sin, was buried, was resurrected, ascended and will come back. You get to hear someone talking about that. That's grace being extended to you, but hearing someone talking about that does not make you a believer in Jesus Christ. We desperately, with pain on the inside, want you to know the majesty of King Jesus and have Him be the hope of your life.

Which brings us to the next thing. Because we get into problems when we start trying to define godliness in terms the Bible doesn't use. The Scriptures will define it, so let's do that. So we have faith and knowledge that produces godliness, which is ". . .in hope of eternal life, . ." So Titus is going to fill in more detail as the book goes on, but he sets with his foundation, that godliness hopes in eternal life. That means your hope is not here. Your hope does not reside in this life. Your hope is in the presence of the King. We need to have a bit of a family chat. I spent two years trying to disciple you and train you up into the greatness and glory of Country Music, and it appears that I'm getting nowhere. So I'm moving on to your taste in TV. So if I were to ask you guys, "What is the greatest TV show of all time?" obviously and clearly we will all agree it's Law & Order. No one is going to argue with that. No one is going to debate it. Should anybody try to come in here and argue with us, we have 20 years of ratings to back us up. But if I were to ask you what the second greatest TV show is, there might be some debates. I would vote for Studio 60. Studio 60 is a show that was a one-season wonder whose ratings don't back me up. But it was a show about the behind the scenes look at Saturday Night Live. On the cast was a group of atheists who surrounded the one believer in Jesus Christ. When the season/series came to an end, two catastrophes were going on at the same time. The executive producer's fiancée was close to death through pregnancy while a cast member's military brother was taken hostage in Afghanistan. There is this really profound scene where the executive producer and the Christian are in the chapel at the hospital. He looks at her and says, "If He's real and He loves me, why doesn't He just fix it?" The reality is this. That is not a question simply asked by the fictional atheist, is it? That is a question being asked by men and women in this room right now. I would submit to you that, whatever it is in your life that's bringing about this pain, the reason He has not fixed it yet is because His desire is to either bring your life in line or keep your life in line with the purpose of the Father in creation, which is the exaltation of the Son. That's why that is in your life right now. And I am not trying to minimize the hurt that you feel right now; I'm trying to give the hurt some eternal perspective. His hope, His plan is to bring your life in line with His purpose of creation.

Let's keep moving, because this hope has an anchor. ". . .in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began. . ." This is a staggering reality about your past, your present and your future. Your anchor of eternal life has nothing to do with your past, nothing to do with your present or your future, but it has everything to do with God's past and His promise. It's anchored in eternity past. And this was just as true for Adam as it is for you, which means you can stop living in shame over your past. You've got eternity past, your past and today. The promise that brought about your conversion, your awakening to Jesus, that promise took place long before you ever had a past. You can stop living in shame over that past. This is why I love baptism services. I love to watch men and women get in those waters and talk about their faith and love for Jesus. Because what they don't know, what I didn't know is that what's taking place is a promise from eternity past being realized in the present. That's what's taking place in baptism. I love it. Also, there is a word that Paul uses that has strong implications for our lives. He uses a word to describe God. You're not going to find the word for the phrase "never lies" in the Bible. You're not going to find it in any Greek translations of the Old Testament. It was a word that was used to describe Greek gods. It is a word that they would have used to describe Zeus and other gods. So Paul takes something that is neutral that had been used for pagan purposes, and he redeems it. That is how we are to live our lives. That's what it means to be an integrated people into society, living for the redemption for that society. We take what's neutral and we redeem it. The best biblical example I can give you of the church's role in society is in Jeremiah 29. In Jeremiah 29, you'll find God saying, "I sent you into exile. I'm the One who sent you into exile. Babylon came down and took you in exile, but I was behind that. But now while you're there, while you're in exile in Babylon, here's what I want you to do. I want you to build houses. I want you to plant gardens. I want you to pray for the welfare (shalom or peace) of the city I sent you into exile to. Because in their welfare, you will find your welfare." We are an integrated people into society meant to live for that society. Now what God could have said was this. He could have said, "I get it. When you get there, you've got to survive. So here's what you need to do. You need to avoid and stay away from them. You've got Babylonians over there, so you come and live over here. Create your own neighborhoods, your own restaurants, your own car dealerships and just stay away from them. Stay out of the way and avoid them. Or

else you're going to live like them. So when it's time to worship the emperor, keep worshiping Me, but act like you're worshiping the emperor." You will not find that in Jeremiah 29. He sent them to be agents of cultural reconciliation inside Babylon. Because God has never just been creating a church. He has been creating a church, but He has also been transforming His creation, His society, redeeming the effects of the fall. So you will not find this sacred/secular chasm in the Bible. What you will find is that we are to invade what is secular with what is sacred. We are to invade what is unholy with what is holy. This is what happened in the incarnation. The Father sent the Son, and the Son incarnated into humanity. And then He went and integrated into society. And He did so without sin and without setting aside His deity. And this is the model we are to follow. We are to incarnate and then integrate for the redemption of that society. And in doing so, we bring life to the city.

There's a question that some of you might be asking. If you are asking it, it's a fair question. If our eternal life is rooted and secure in eternity past, why this urgency to go and redeem our city? I think verse 3 is going to help us. ". . .and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching. . ." Now there are two ways the Scriptures speak about redemption. I was an Economics major in college, so here they are: macro and micro. In macro redemption, you have Genesis to Revelation, an overview of redemptive history. Micro is the redemption of the individual sinner. I believe this text is speaking about micro redemption, the redemption of the individual. So what was secured in eternity past comes to being in the present. So what was guaranteed was a locked down eternity past by the promise of God comes to realization in the present. And if we asked Paul, "By preaching, what did you mean? Did you mean sermons? Did you mean this? What did you mean by evangelism?" I think that Paul would have just said, "Yes." Which is why gospel centrality must mark our sermons. Gospel centrality also must mark your evangelism. When you speak about Jesus in your neighborhood, on your street, with your family, in your work places, you need to speak about Jesus in a way that the Scriptures speak about Jesus. They do not portray Him as self-help. They do not portray Him as a pleasure killer. He is the resurrected King of kings source of infinite joy. We need to speak about Christ in a way that people wish it was true. I'll confess that this is much easier to do in here than it is on the block, isn't it? It is much easier to come gather with one another and speak boldly about the gospel of Christ. It's easy to stick on this mic and talk to people who love Jesus about the gospel of Christ. I do not have neighbors knocking on my door saying, "Hey pastor, can I confess some sin to you?" That's now how it works. I am growing in this with you. It's easier in here. But we're to fight for it. We're to war for it. Because when we do and gospel centrality marks our lives in our neighborhoods and in our gatherings, they work in tandem. So I'm growing in this with you.

Let's keep reading. ". . .the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior;. . ." I just want to hit pause and talk to the seminary students. We love you. I want you to hear that from one of your pastor's mouths. We love you. You are not arrogant. You are not pushy. You serve well. You are faithful. You are some of our top-tier leadership. I love to look out on Sundays and see our welcome team, our parking team full of seminary students. We love you. You are a blessing to our church, and you're a blessing to my faith. I am grateful for you. And most of you, as best as we can tell, desire to preach and teach for godly reasons. My encouragement to you would simply be this. Be patient. The Lord has given you a gift for the building up of the body of Christ. He did not give it to you so that you would sit on it your entire life. Just be patient. When He's ready, He'll open the door.

Let's keep reading, because there was something profound that we just read in verse 3 that I want us to link with verse 4. "To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior." So if we look at verse 3, we'll find "God our Savior," and then in verse 4, we find "Christ Jesus our Savior." And if we jump ahead to Titus 3:5, we would find that salvation is applied by the regenerating, the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. So in this book, we're going to get a snapshot of the Trinity's work in salvation. The Father and Son are going to be called co-Savior, and if we put it all together, we would find that the Father is the Architect of the plan, the Son implements the plan while the Spirit applies the plan. The plan of the Father, through the work of the Son and the Spirit, is to put your

life in line with His purpose in creation, which is the exaltation of the Son. We exist to glorify the Father by exalting the Son in the power of the Spirit. And the Lord is going to send help along the way to all of us. He opens verse 4 by saying, "To Titus, my true child in a common faith: . . ." I love my family, but conversion in my family is few and far between. So while I love my biological family, they are not a spiritual family. The Lord has been gracious to me in my wife and by giving us you as a spiritual family. In the middle of that body, He has given me a spiritual father in Bill Seal. And then on a routine Tuesday afternoon, May 17, we get a call that Bill has a tumor. And a week later we find out it's bad. Here's what I know. At some point, that call or one like it comes for me, it comes for you and it comes for the people around us. And when it does, the size of your 401k will do nothing for your soul. Grace and peace will not come from green paper when that call comes to you. Grace and peace come by the Father through the Son. That's it. It doesn't come from anywhere else. And we have been sent out because Christ is going to return, not if, not maybe, but when. We have been sent out to proclaim the Son by integrating into our city for the redemption of the city, and this should stir urgency inside of us. It should drive and motivate us. It should compel us. I want so desperately for you to see this and know this, because as we go through Titus, you're going to hear belief and behavior, and Titus is not just talking about your sanctification. He is also talking about our city's redemption. As we're integrated into our city, the way that we live our lives matters for the good of the city and for the transformation of the world. And our prayer, our hope, our desperate longing is that we would continue as a body, as a family to grow in this by the grace of God and a joy of God together until Christ returns and brings final restoration to all things.

Let me pray. "Father, we come right now asking that You, in Your grace and mercy, would do what only You can to through the work of Your Spirit, and that is to exalt Your Son. This work we have to entrust to You because Your Word says You do not lie and Your Word says that this is work that only You do. So if there was anything I said that was not true and not of You, if there was anything I said that was true that misrepresented You, would You please erase that from their minds right now? Would You send out Your people, built up in the faith until the return of Christ Jesus our Savior? Amen."