

This month as I prayed, thought and tried to discern God's heart for us, I felt led to lead us into studying Paul's letter to Titus. So that's where we're going to be for the next four weeks. What I want to do this morning is essentially push us off of the dock and set sail for where we're going to go the rest of the month. So I want to try to frame what we're going to be doing and maybe why we're going to be studying this particular letter. So I want to simply introduce you to this letter. Some of you no doubt have read this letter or have heard this letter taught on, so this will not be anything new for you. Others of you have never read this letter. You don't know who Titus was, maybe you don't know who the apostle Paul is or maybe you don't understand why this would be in the Scriptures. So I want to introduce us to the letter this morning, and then I want to tell you why I chose this particular letter to study as opposed to other letters in the Bible. I could have chosen anything, so why this one? That's a great question you should always ask if your pastor is preaching a series. And then I want to read the entire letter with you this morning, which will be an exercise that some of you may have never done. And then after we read the entire letter, we're going to spend some time in prayer together, praying for God to use what Paul wrote to Titus so many years ago to encourage us, to strengthen us, to correct us, to rebuke us or for whatever He needs to do through it as we journey and study it through these next few weeks.

So let's start by just introducing you to the letter to Titus. As I mentioned earlier, the author of the letter is the apostle Paul. Paul was a man who was a fierce opponent of Christianity. One of his main goals before God converted him was to kill Christians. He was going around town finding Christians, putting them in jail and eagerly hoping that they would be killed because of their faith in Jesus Christ. God saved him miraculously (as anybody who has been saved has been saved miraculously). God turned him into an apostle, one who is sent to proclaim the beauty, the majesty and the marvelous grace of Christ. So you see all through the New Testament Paul traveling around and writing letters to these churches. He's the one who wrote this letter, as he wrote other letters that we have in the Scriptures, to a guy named Titus. Not much is known about Titus. If you read the history books or ask the scholars, they'll say some things, but in terms of what's actually in the Bible about Titus, there's not much. If you read Paul's letter to the Galatians, you learn that Titus was a Greek. So he was not a Jew, but a Greek. You also learn that he was a Greek who became a Christian because of the ministry of Paul. In other words, he was a convert of Paul. Paul shared the gospel as he would go from town to town, and Titus became a Christian because of Paul's ministry. We will read that Paul calls Titus, "My true child." Many people take that to mean that Titus was actually a direct convert of the apostle Paul. Regardless how Titus became a Christian, what we know about him for sure from the Scriptures is that, after he became a Christian, Titus became one of Paul's most trusted coworkers in gospel ministry. So after he became a Christian, he became a minister of the gospel vocationally, and we know that he was one of Paul's trusted and close associates in the ministry that Jesus had given him to complete. We know this for a couple of reasons. Number one, Titus was actually given a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth that was a very severe letter. We don't actually have this letter in our Scriptures. We have two letters to the church in Corinth from Paul, but there's another one that he wrote that we don't have. What we know about it is it was a pretty severe letter. Paul wrote it and was rebuking and correcting them about some different things. So you have Paul here writing a letter that he's not going to be able deliver himself. Wouldn't he want one of his most trusted comrades to deliver it? Of course. So the person he chooses to go into this very sticky situation where this letter is going to be read aloud would have been very close to Paul. It's not going to be happy times. It's a severe letter. That's what the scholars call it. So whatever it had, we know it really grieved Paul and was hard for him. But he entrusted Titus to carry the letter into Corinth and share it with the church. So from that, we gather that Paul really trusted this guy. With one of the stickiest, thorniest situations of his ministry, Paul gives this letter to Titus to take. And then of course, from

this letter that he wrote to Titus himself, we learn that Paul entrusted him to doing some pretty significant things. So we know that Titus was a Greek convert to Christianity who was in the ministry with the apostle Paul and that the apostle Paul trusted him very much.

In this letter that Paul wrote to Titus, the time line is a little sketchy. Scholars aren't quite sure exactly when this letter was written, but we do know it was written before Paul died, which was around 65 A.D. So in the early 60's, Paul wrote this letter, which is amazing to think about. Because Jesus Christ was killed and raised from the dead around 30-33 A.D. So this letter that Paul wrote was written during a time when eyewitnesses of what happened to Jesus were still alive. That is profound to think about. So he's writing these things about God, he's establishing churches and people who actually saw Jesus Christ crucified and raised from the dead three days later are still alive while Paul is writing this. So we know that this letter was written in the early 60's, and most scholars believe that it was written after Paul's first imprisonment in Rome. So Paul was in prison a couple of different times in Rome. The book of Acts ends with Paul in prison. And then many scholars conjecture that, after Paul was released from prison the first time, he went with Timothy, Titus and a few others to the island of Crete. There they began to share the gospel in these different cities that were on this island. Perhaps a city had a synagogue, to which Paul would frequently go. He would go into a city, find the synagogue and get up and explain how the Jewish Scriptures actually pointed to Jesus Christ as Savior, and the people would come to faith in the Lord through that. So they went around these different cities and evangelized the island, and as they did, their ministry was fruitful. So as they shared the gospel, people heard it and began to put their trust, hope and faith in Jesus Christ as their God and Savior. Essentially local churches are begun in these cities on this island. After these people came to know the Lord, Paul and Timothy leave the island to go somewhere else. And what we know from the letter is that Paul and Timothy left Titus on the island of Crete to take these churches that had been planted and get them established and healthy. And that's the purpose of the letter. Paul wrote to Titus to encourage him, teach him and instruct him how to get these churches that they had planted established and healthy. In Titus 1:5, Paul says to Titus, "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." So he left Titus, this faithful co-laborer in gospel ministry, on the island to take these young Christians and to get them organized and established as a local church and get them healthy. Every single commentary I have read has said that this is the main purpose of this letter. Paul say many things in this letter, but everything he's saying is going toward getting these churches that had been planted established and healthy, healthy to the degree that they would be living their lives as Christians, as a community of Christians who are living their lives, both corporately and individually, in such a way that those who are outside the faith would look at their lives and say, "Man, that is sure attractive." So Paul is wanting to get Titus to get these churches they had planted healthy to the point that they could become outpost communities of God's people who shine bright amidst the unbelieving cities that they're in. Because the gospel had never come to these cities as far as we know. These are dark places. So he's saying, "I want you to get them established and growing together. And as they begin to live their lives in a way that would glorify God, people will see it, and it will be bright and attractive." Think here the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says to this community of people, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. But they put the lamp on a stand, and the light is so bright it gives light to all who are in the house. In this same way, let your light shine before others so they may see your good works and bring glory to your Father who is in heaven." That's why Paul wrote the letter to Titus, so that this would happen. Gordon Fee, who is a scholar, really does not the similarities between what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount and what Paul says in this letter to Titus. He says, "The dominant theme in Titus, therefore, is good works, that is, exemplary Christian behavior and that for the sake of outsiders." So the primary purpose is that these people would live their lives in an exemplary way in light of God's grace so that those who are outside the church would benefit from it. That's the main purpose according to Fee. Christ died precisely such a people, a people who would be zealous for good works. So that's the purpose of the letter.

So that leads me to the reason why I chose this particular letter for us as a church to study together. Why did I choose this letter? Why not Philippians? Why not 1 or 2 Timothy? Why did I choose Titus? The primary reason I chose this letter over the others is because the churches that Paul refers to in this particular letter are young, developing churches. They're young. These are people who just came to faith. They're developing and learning what it means to be a church together. And I believe this has particular relevance to us as a church because we too are a young, developing, local church. Although we're not young in the same sense, we are young in a different sense. This is based on the total numbers of our 781 members of our Denton campus as of June 22. Of our 781 covenant members, 40% are under 25 years old and 60% are under 30 years old. So we are an extremely young congregation in that sense. That's just covenant members. That's not you who just come on Sunday and are not covenant members. If we added all of you into that, the average age would actually be than that, due to all the college students and young professionals that we have coming. Only 10% of our covenant members are over 50 years old. So we are an extremely young, developing, local church. So if you're 26 here, you're old. In our context, if you're 31, you're really old. And if you're over 50, you are elderly. In addition to the age, some of us have just become Christians in the last couple of years. So just because someone may be older in age, doesn't mean they're older in maturity. So we've got a lot of people here who have become Christians in the last couple years, even if they're older. And in addition to that, we are an extremely transient congregation. In the Fall, we'll have anywhere between 1,500 and 2,000 people who will come and gather for our services on Sunday. Out of those, there are probably around 500-700 who are actually here. In other words, they're those who are not on their way in or on their way out. There is about 1,000 or more who are just kind of coming or going. You're not really here, you're just coming in the door and leaving. I used to lament the fact that not everybody would stay in Denton after they came here and graduate. I still do to some extent, but I'm excited about the fact that we're such a transient community, that there are so many students who come here. Because for those of us who are here, we actually have about a 2-4 year window to teach these Christians who come into our services what it means to be a church, which is not something that is taught very well. Part of what we're doing is teaching ourselves what it means to be a member of a local church. So these people who come into our doors and leave a year or two later have an opportunity to see what it means to be a Christian who lives in community with a local church. So I'm excited that our demographics are they way they are. So in essence, we are a very young, transient, developing local church. And that's why I chose this particular letter for us to study together.

My burden for us is really the same burden Paul had for these churches and every church that he planted. It's that we would continue to grow in maturity together, resisting temptation and worldliness in such a way and to such a degree that we would say something to our neighborhood, to our city about the character and glory of God. I hope that your light would shine bright like the light that's set on a stand in the house. Due to the factors that I just mentioned, there is always a great temptation for our local church to fall into worldliness. Now there is a temptation to fall into worldliness for all Christians everywhere, but because of the factors that I just mentioned, I think that there is a unique temptation for our local church to fall into worldliness. When you take a local church that is young like ours is and you place it in a neighborhood in a city like ours, a neighborhood that is not quiet about their animosity towards orthodox Christianity, a neighborhood whose residents really do value their autonomy and personal freedom above all things, the opportunity to drift and to follow the lusts of the flesh is great. It's very, very dangerous. Daily and weekly, we see this happening among our covenant members and our attendees here. We see it all the time where our hearts go chasing after the very same things that the world chases after. We put our hope in these false saviors, these things, these people or these degrees to bring us significance, to bring us value, to bring us meaning, to bring us comfort, to bring us power or to bring us satisfaction. Our heart daily goes toward these false saviors. That's where we put our hope. That's where we anchor our hope. And because we do, out of that heart that is inclined in that direction, all sorts of worldly behavior comes. We see this all the time. Because our hearts are that way and pointed toward these things to get out of them what we can only get from God, all sorts of worldly behavior follows. It happens in our church. I'm not just talking about the random person who comes in who is not a Christian. In our church, in our attendees, in those who come here professing

to be Christians, we see them putting their hopes in other things, and we see all sorts of inappropriate relationships, we see that divorce is just rampant, we see sexual immorality and on and on I could go. There is anxiety, depression, covetousness and all these behaviors that come out of a heart that is looking to something or someone other than Jesus Christ to bring identity, meaning, satisfaction and validation. And this is the context that our young, developing church finds itself in. And if we as a church don't learn how to live as Christians in the middle of this neighborhood, in the middle of this city without becoming just like it, we will cease as a church to be distinctively Christian. Jesus would say it this way in a word picture that really is hard to forget. He said, "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet." If the church quits being what God created it to be, we're not going to be salt anymore, we're not going to be beneficial to anyone anymore. So there's this urgency, this soberness about being God's people and living in light of His saving grace to us. So this is my burden for us as a young, transient church. Tullian Tchividjian wrote an entire book about this. He said, "Christians make a difference in the world by being different from this world; they don't make a difference by being the same. . . We need to remember that God has established his church as an alternative society, not to compete with or copy this world, but to offer a refreshing alternative to it. When we forget this, we inadvertently communicate to our culture that we have nothing unique to offer, nothing deeply spiritual or profoundly transforming. Tragically, this leaves many in our world looking elsewhere for the difference they crave." So Paul, in this letter he writes to Titus, is going to encourage us and exhort us to do this as a church, to make a difference by being different than the world.

As we'll see in the next few weeks, he has something to say to all of us. He talks to the older, the younger, the elders and leadership of the church. He speaks to all of us. All of us have a part to play. And he speaks to us about every different context we find ourselves in, whether that's what it looks like in the home, whether it's what it looks like in the neighborhood, whether it's what it looks like in the workplace or public square or whether it's what it looks like as we function together as a church, he's going to hit it all. So I am very eager for us as a church to hear what God has to say through such a letter. And God is gracious to leave us a letter. He's just gracious to our local church to leave us this letter, as we are a young church, as we're continuing to ask Him to make us a healthy church that's growing up in such a way that we glorify Him and display His character and His nature to our neighbors. He's so gracious to leave us this instruction that is so clear, that is helpful and that corrects us and encourages us. So if you're a Christian, my hope is that you will hear what God would have to say to you. I don't know how God will speak to you through this letter, but I have been praying for weeks now that He would. And if you're not a Christian, I know that I just painted our city with a very broad brush. So you may have already been offended by something that I've said this morning. But my hope is that, as you read this letter with us, you will have some things clarified about what the Christian faith is, about what it's not. I hope you will have some things clarified about what it is that makes us Christian and how God means for His people to live and why He means for them to live that way. So that's my hope for this series. Maybe through this, God and His church would become attractive to you, even if it's attractive in an offensive way. I'm not going to try to unnecessarily offend anybody, but I just hope that that's something you'll want to come back and learn about.

What I want to do now is just read the letter. In those churches who preach from the Bible, I think we do a really good job of dissecting the Bible. So we talk a lot about the trees, but sometimes we miss the forest. This letter was actually written to be read as a letter. Paul wrote it to Titus as a letter, so we're going to dive into it a little bit deeper and take some different sections and unpack it in the next few weeks, but I thought that we could just start our time as we push off from the dock here and set sail this month to just read the letter like a letter and really get a sense of it and a sense of what God is saying. Because Titus would have received this, read it and then he would have gotten in front of a church in a setting like this and read it aloud to the church. And everybody would have had to sit there and listen to what Paul had written and what God had said through the apostle Paul. So that's what I want to do. And do you want to know what's amazing? I have no idea how God might choose to speak to you this morning as we do this. What is always

amazing to me is that, if you think about this room, there are 400 people in this room coming from 400 different sets of circumstances this week. I was talking to a couple on the greeting team who is welcoming their next child into the world on Thursday. I talked to a couple others before the service who are here from Egypt and Thailand for a few weeks. I talked to others who are having a hard time financially. I talked to others who are trying to find a new house so they can get ready for the school year. Just think about the diversity of circumstances that we find ourselves in this morning. So I have no idea how God's Spirit might choose through this letter to to speak specifically to you and then to us as a body, but I know that He wants to.

So let's pray before we read this and ask God to help us hear. I know that we spend a majority of our week answering e-mails and tweeting, so that doesn't really help the attention span in terms of actually sitting down and reading something that's a little bit longer than 140 characters. So let's pray that He would give us an attentiveness to Him and that He would minister to our hearts in ways that nobody could plan. So let's pray, and then we'll read this together. "Father, we thank You for this portion of Your holy Word. We thank You that You have not left us to ourselves to try to figure out what it means to live the Christian life and what it means to be a church that's healthy, growing and resisting temptation and worldliness. You have not left us to ourselves. You have given us Your Spirit. And Father, I pray, by Your Spirit through this letter that Paul wrote so many years ago, that You would minister to us. I pray that You would help us to hear now as we read it. God, I'm just eager to see how these seeds fall. I have no idea what You intend to do this morning, but I pray that You would speak to us. Whether it's a verse, a section or an idea that we get, I pray that You would minister to us through Your Word. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen."

So let's read and see what Paul wrote to Titus.

*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.*

*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—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*

*For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.*

*But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be soberminded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.*

*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, 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.*

*Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.*

*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. 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. 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. 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. But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.*

*When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.*

*All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith.*

*Grace be with you all.*

This is the Word of God, and God is good to give it to us. What I want to do now is move into a time of praying together. Mark Dever, who is a pastor and a friend of mine in Washington D.C, pastors a church called Capitol Hill Baptist Church. He wrote, "If a healthy church is a congregation that increasingly displays the character of God as His character has been revealed in His Word, the most obvious place to begin building a healthy church is to call Christians to listen to God's Word." So God has spoken to us in this letter that Paul wrote to Titus, and we're going to spend the rest of the month listening to what He said. So I want to just pray through a few things. As we hear the gospel, as we believe the gospel, as we come together the next few weeks, I pray that God would transform us as we hear and believe the gospel. I just want to lead us through a few points of prayer as we look forward to the weeks ahead studying this letter.

The first thing I want to pray about is that God would take these words that He inspired and that He will grow us individually and corporately into maturity. I want us to pray that God would use this next month, as we study this letter, to grow us in maturity, to make us a healthier church than we are. And when I say “maturity,” I mean in every sense of the word. I mean doctrinally, that we would understand more about who God is and what He has done. But I also mean communally, as we grow together in our community. All across the board, I pray that He would grow us in maturity. So why don't you pray that God would use this time and this next month to do that in you and in us as a church corporately?

© 2011 *The Village Church*