

Titus (Part 1) – God’s Promised Plan

Josh Patterson – July 27, 2014

Good morning, church. How are we? Good? Good. All right. Well, my name is Josh Patterson. I serve as one of the pastors here on staff. Matt is out with his bride, celebrating their 15-year wedding anniversary, so we rejoice with them. You guys are stuck with me. There is a phrase, and over the years, the more I’ve thought about this particular phrase, the less comfortable I have grown with it.

The sentence is this: “Jesus is the most important part of my life.” The reason I’ve grown less comfortable with this particular sentence the more I’ve thought about it is that I think this phrase is a deviation of what the Bible would talk about my life being. You see, the Bible talks about (Jesus makes it really clear in John 15) how I can do nothing apart from him and how life itself is only found in him.

If I am to say Jesus is the most important part of my life, Jesus is correcting me and saying this to me: “Josh, no, no, no. You’re misunderstanding it. I’m not the most important part of your life; *I am life*. There is no life apart from me. There’s existence, there’s something, but there is not true, vibrant life.” In fact, Jesus says, “What you will do is come and lay down your life, and then and only then will I give you life.”

This idea of compartmentalization, this idea of me relegating Jesus to a portion of my life, even if it’s the biggest portion of my life, is a failure to understand what life truly is about and where life truly is found. This idea of compartmentalization is something we all walk in to some degree. It’s the idea of, “I’m going to take these emotions, and I’m going to put them over here in this closet and keep that door shut, and hopefully I don’t have to open that.”

Or, “I’m going to keep my life segmented like this: I have work, I have play, I have family, and on and on and on.” The thing with compartmentalization is it looks like a pie graph, and depending on what I value and care about most, I can divvy that up in any way I choose. I may be somebody who really cares about family, so I’m going to devote a lot of my time, attention, and affection to my family.

I may be a guy who really cares about work, so I'm going to give a lot of my time, attention, and affection to work. The idea of a pie graph works because we can split it up in any way we want, but the picture Christianity paints is different. It's not one of a pie graph. It's more like a hub and a spoke where Jesus sits at the center of the wheel, so to speak, and all of life emanates out from him, so my life isn't segmented up as work, play, family, and whatever, but Jesus sits at the literal center of my life and influences every aspect of me.

He influences my work. He influences my play. He influences my marriage. He influences my parenting. He influences my hobbies, my time, my resources, my talents, and on and on and on. Maybe another way to understand this is to look at marriage. In a marriage ceremony, you have a wife-to-be and a husband-to-be who stand up at the altar and exchange some vows. Sadly, many of us have treated our Christianity like this.

We had this moment where we exchanged rings and promises and vows, and then we turned away and walked and lived as if we were single people. You know what's a really dumb idea of something for a married guy to do? It's to live like a single guy. You know what's really disastrous for a married woman to do? It's to live as if she's single. When we stand up at the altar... Literally, when I was there with my wife and we exchanged some things, we exchanged some vows and some promises and rings, then there was this growing alignment that began to occur.

It occurred there in that moment when she assumed my name. Then we began to share things. We share finances, we share a home, we share a bed, and we share children. We share all of these things. There's this growing alignment with our lives, and the Christian faith should mirror something like that.

The Christian faith should be that time for you and I when there is that moment when we are indeed confessing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and following that confession there is a growing alignment with my life where I am growing more and more and more to look like this Savior who I confess. But like I said, sadly in my own life and (I would dare to say) in some of the lives in here... We have relegated Jesus to a slice of the pie.

We have kept him at bay, so to speak, from this area or that area because it's just a little bit more comfortable and convenient if our Christianity shows up maybe on a Sunday morning or maybe (if I'm really in) on a Sunday morning and at a home group. We do that rather than understanding that

literally every breath, every aspect of our lives, every fiber of who we are, has been bought with a price. I'm to lay my life down for the one who ultimately laid his life down for me.

We're going to have the opportunity over the next several weeks to walk through a book of the Bible, and that book of the Bible is called Titus. In the book of Titus, what the apostle Paul is going to unpack for us is this link between gospel belief and gospel behavior. He's going to really deal with the compartmentalization of our faith and talk about the totality of it. He's going to reorient the gospel to the center and talk about how that impacts literally every aspect of our lives.

With Jesus being at the center and Jesus being right there as the hub, Paul is going to talk about how this impacts every aspect of our lives. One of the things we're going to have the opportunity to do (I'm going to walk us through this briefly here) is I'm going to give you a big overview of what the book of Titus is all about. Why was this book written? Who wrote it? What's going on?

I'm going to hopefully paint a picture that is going to give us a little bit of context to better understand what's going on in this book. The book of Titus is what's called a *Pastoral Epistle*. There are three Pastoral Epistles; there are 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and the book of Titus. Titus is the shortest of the Pastoral Epistles, and it's written by a guy named the apostle Paul.

Paul writes this book to a guy named Titus, okay? Paul and Titus are different. We don't know a ton about Titus, not nearly as much as we know about the apostle Paul, but here's what we know about Titus. Paul says Titus was his "true child in a common faith." What we learn about Titus is he more than likely came to Christ through the ministry of Paul. At some point along the way, the apostle Paul evangelized in an area where Titus was, and Titus confessed Christ.

Then Paul brought him in, began to mentor him, began to share with him, began to shepherd him, began to grow him up in the Lord, and Titus demonstrated and was an example of some spiritual vitality. Even at a young age, he demonstrated a maturity in his faith. One of the ways we begin to see that is in Galatians, chapter 2. In Galatians, chapter 2, Paul said, "Hey, when I went to Jerusalem, I brought Titus along with me," and the reason he brought Titus along with him was this.

"I brought Titus with me to Jerusalem to demonstrate to the counsel there in Jerusalem that in fact this gospel has gone out to the Gentiles, those who are not Jews. Those Gentile believers do not have to adhere to the Mosaic Law." Titus was the example of that, so Paul brought Titus in before the Jerusalem counsel. He was there, and he showed Titus by way of example to say, "This faith has

been genuinely transmitted and passed on to the Gentiles, and these Gentiles do not have to adhere to the Mosaic Law."

This was a really big deal. Titus came into that meeting an uncircumcised Greek, and (I'm sure he was thrilled about this) he left an uncircumcised Greek. Theologically and physically, that was a great day for Titus, but in that moment, the church took on a different form and a different shape. All of a sudden, the church was no longer battling some of those same things, but they had put a stake in the ground to say this: "We do not have to adhere to the Law because Christ has fulfilled the Law."

Can I get an amen for all of that? Then Paul began to use Titus in a variety of different situations as Titus was growing in his faith, and he began to dispatch Titus to do some really sensitive gospel work. Specifically, Titus shows up in the Corinthian church. He was at the Corinthian church on two, maybe three, separate occasions, beginning to work out some of the issues the Corinthians were facing. This is the kind of guy Titus was.

He was a stud. He apparently had courage. He could walk into tough situations. He could walk into situations that were delicate and sensitive, and he had the ability to navigate those with the courage and confidence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So as the church began to expand through the book of Acts... We walked through that series earlier in the spring. The church multiplies out of joy, remember?

The church began to multiply and multiply and multiply, and the multiplication of the church created new issues which forced Paul to have new strategies. The new issues that were created in the church were namely this. If a situation arose, the way Paul used to handle it was by penning a letter to an individual church: Philippians, Galatians, Ephesians, Corinthians, Thessalonians...

But the church had expanded to such a degree that he could no longer write letters to individual churches. Praise the Lord! The gospel had spread, so the strategy Paul was now employing was to dispatch his faithful coworkers. He was dispatching faithful men to go and act on his behalf. At some point, Paul, Timothy, and Titus went to evangelize Crete, a little island off of the Mediterranean coast.

When they showed up in Crete, they began to witness and testify of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that the Savior of the world had come to rescue and redeem lost sinners, and (praise

the Lord) churches were born. People came to faith. But what Paul needed to do now was leave with Timothy to head to Ephesus.

Titus remained in Crete, and in that time during Paul's leaving and Titus's remaining, the church in Crete began to experience some problems, specifically some problems that had been brought in by a group called the Judaizers, also known as the circumcision party. Not a great name, right? Titus had been down that road before, and this circumcision party was a group that had infiltrated the ranks of the church and begun to teach falsely that yet again the people had to adhere to the Mosaic Law.

In that teaching, they began to teach some things like the idea that the physical was bad and only the spiritual was good, and some gnostic tendencies started to show up. We'll get more into this in week 3 of the study, but you just need to know that this teaching had created two things in the church: unhealthiness and disorder. The thrust and the reason that Paul wrote the letter of Titus, the reason that compelled Paul to pen this letter to his "true child in a common faith" was this. He wanted Titus to restore health and order through gospel proclamation and gospel application.

That's why he wrote it. He wanted Titus to restore order and health in the church through gospel proclamation and gospel application. The theme you're going to see all throughout the letter is this. There is an inextricable link between gospel belief and gospel behavior, between sound doctrine and sound living, between the good gospel and the good works that flow from it.

Paul is going to be meticulous all throughout the letter to make sure the order is right. He wants to show that gospel behavior flows from a gospel belief, that you don't get gospel belief from gospel behavior, but this behavior emanates out of a right understanding. As the gospel takes root in a heart, it begins to produce gospel fruit in that person.

Paul is going to say this. "In fact, you should be able to look back and validate that gospel root with that gospel fruit." In chapter 1, he starts off with the first four verses. He's going to give a greeting. He's going to provide a theological framework through which Titus can live and minister at the island of Crete. Then the rest of chapter 1 is instructions to Titus. Chapters 2 and 3 are instructions to the church.

Chapter 1, instructions to Titus, breaks down like this. He's going to ask Titus to appoint elders and to refute the false teachers. In chapter 2, he's going to say this. "The instructions for the church: Get

the right social order in line in the church and set yourselves up in a way that promotes human flourishing." Then in chapter 3 he says, "Don't forget we're lights and witnesses to a lost and dying world." That's the book of Titus.

Now there's a narrative technique called *in-media res* that they use in writing and cinema and film. *In media res* is Latin for in the middle of something or into the midst of. It means without preamble. If you think of a good crime detective movie or a good fiction story that literally opens right at the scene and you're not quite sure what's going on...

If you've seen *The Usual Suspects*, for example... That's a movie that starts in media res. It starts at a scene, and it's unfolding right before you. You're not quite sure what to do with it, and then they use flashback and loop you back in. You may be a little confused right up until the end, where he stops walking with that limp, and you go, "Oh my God! These guys are so sick..."

Have y'all seen that movie? Okay. Maybe I'm by myself. Another example of *in media res* is Homer's *Illiad*, but I didn't think many of us would understand and know how to relate to that as well. That's how *in media res* works. Let me say this. It's awesome in cinema. It's really great in writing. It's really horrible for Bible study, okay?

So often, many of us jump into a text *in media res*. We just pick up a Bible, open it up, and go, "This is where I'm going to camp out today. I have no idea what came before this verse. I have no idea what's after this verse. I have no idea why this verse is in the Bible. It just feels really good right now." Okay, so what we're going to do is step back and get the picture. We're going to step back and get the essence of what this letter is all about.

The way I'm going to do that is by reading the book of Titus. Yep. I'm going to read the whole thing, okay? You're going to read it with me. Now here's the great thing, and I don't mean this as a joke. I mean this sincerely. For some of us, this may be literally the first time we've read through an entire book of the Bible. That's awesome. Today you're going to get a sense of what this letter is about.

I tried to set it up in such a way that you'll be able to pull out some of these things: the idea of sound doctrine and sound works, gospel living rooted in gospel belief... You're going to see the false teachers. You're going to see what Paul says about those things, and then we'll end our time by looking at the first four verses of the book of Titus.

If you don't have a Bible, there's one in the seat back in front of you. It says this.

"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 sober-minded, 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. Bondservants 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."

It's a great letter. It's short and poignant. It's to the point. Woven throughout those instructions are these three theological gems. You see it in Chapter 1, verses 1-4. You see it in chapter 2, and then you see it at the end of chapter 3. Throughout this letter, Paul is urging Titus to restore health and order through gospel proclamation and gospel application to a church that at some point had lost its way.

I want to focus on the first four verses of the book. Here's what I want to talk about. This is the crux of what I want to talk about during our time this morning. *God's promised plan involves participation, provides grace, and produces peace.* What you see right here in the beginning is Paul says, "**...a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ...**" He says, "The reason I'm doing this is for the sake of God's elect." That's what's compelling him. "**...and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life...**"

Then he says, "**...which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began...**" So God's promised plan... What is this plan? The plan Paul is referring to here is a plan that was in the heart and the counsel and the mind of God from ages past, and the plan is specifically and namely this: that he would send his Son as a rescuer, that he would send his Son and his Son would die in the stead of sinful man and sinful woman, that his Son would do for humanity what humanity could not do for itself.

When you think about the wonder of this plan, it's remarkable to think that this began in ages past, that it didn't just happen in Genesis, chapter 3 when God just had this "Oops!" moment. "I can't believe this happened and now sin has entered the world. What's plan B? Let's do this." God's plan

has always been the sending of his Son to call a people to himself through the effective and sufficient death of a Savior.

Think about that. Think about the wonder of that. Think about the power of that. Think about what Paul was saying to Titus and what he's saying to you and to me as well this morning, that this promised plan is banking on the character and the nature of God, that this plan is not Paul's plan, Titus's plan, or Timothy's plan. It's not the plan of these elders who he's going to appoint. It's not their plan. This is the plan of God Almighty, and look what he says about God.

"...who never lies..." He *can't* lie. It's not within his nature to lie. Contrast that with the Cretans, who were always liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons. Think about the rest and the solace of knowing this, that this gospel promise doesn't rest on my shoulders, that the fulfillment of this gospel plan and the unfolding of these promises does not fall on me. Think about what Paul is saying to Titus here. "Hey, you're going to go in, and you're going to step into a messy situation, but know this, Titus: this is God's deal. Ultimately, he has got this. He has you covered."

Earlier this week, I was talking with Hunter Hall, who's the Plano campus pastor. They're preparing to launch the campus you heard about earlier this morning. Hunter said this. "I've just taken great solace in Matthew 16, where Jesus says, 'I will build my church.' God isn't saying, 'Hunter, you go build my church. He's not saying that. He's saying, 'Hunter, I'm going to build my church. I've got it.'"

For some of us in here this morning, what good news that is to a heart that is so full of striving, to a heart that may be a little bit anxious and wondering, "Is God actually going to take care of me?" What you see in this text is this beautiful reality. **"...God, who never lies, promised before the ages began..."** that he has in Christ met your greatest need. It's done. Your greatest need has been met in Christ, and God himself is writing the check that God himself will cash.

1. *God's promised plan involves participation.* It just kind of gets even more amazing the more in consider it. God could have unfolded this plan in any way he wanted to. He could have unfolded this plan by any means or any measure he chose, but he chose to involve you and to involve me.

You see right here, **"Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ..."** *Apostle* means sent one or messenger. Paul says this at the end of verse 3. **"...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..." You see, this gospel promise, this gospel message, had been promulgated over the years and over the centuries and over the millennia through the faithful witness and testimony of people like you and me.

That's how it happens. Somebody tells somebody who tells somebody. I have four kids, which means one of them is always in the way at some point. They're just there. We love them. We're very grateful for them, and we love the house that's full. My oldest is eight. My youngest is one. I have three girls and a boy. When I think about the idea of participation, that God calls us to participate...

Let's just say Natalie and I need to move a couch, okay? We're going to pick up the couch and we're going to move it across the room. The reality is my kids can't help in that process because they can't lift the couch. None of them can. All four of them together can't, but there's something really sweet about the fact that when I go down to pick it up, maybe my boy comes and says, "Dad, can I help?"

I just kind of say, "Sure. Grab a side right here." He just kind of walks with me as we move the couch over there. Now did he help? No. No, he didn't do anything. He was just there. But here's what's awesome: he was there! The involved participation of the gospel is very similar to that. Here's the reality. You can't change anybody. There are no clever words or arguments that are going to change anybody.

If you think you can change somebody, you may. You'll just change them for the worse. But you and I cannot change people's hearts. I can't change my wife. She can't change me. I can't change my kids. They can't change me. At times, I wish I could change people, but you know what's amazing? It's that God invites his people in, and he says, "Come with me! Come watch! Come watch as *I* change somebody! Come watch as *I* open eyes! Come on. Come on. Watch this. Watch this happen. Watch me give sight to the blind. Watch me bring somebody from death to life."

Who doesn't want to see that? Who doesn't want to be a part of that? Who doesn't want to participate in this gospel promise? But church, we've gotten complacent here. We've gotten complacent in this, and I get that some of us have a bit of trepidation and fear. "Oh, I'm not quite sure what I'm going to say, and I'm not quite sure what I'm going to do, so I'm going to leave that up to the professionals, whoever those guys are."

You know what that gospel witness is? That gospel witness is simply this. It's what Paul says in Corinthians 15. Christ died for our sins, and he rose again. I don't understand all of it. I just know

Christ died for my sins and rose again. Christ died for my sins, and he rose again. Praise the Lord for that! He died for my sins, and he rose again! In that speaking, as that gospel proclamation comes off of the lips of faithful men and women, God does what only God can do.

It's not because you say something in the right order. It's not because your arguments are really tight and so convincing. It's through faithful and courageous speaking of the hope that's within you. To watch the Lord work... Those of you here right now who have seen it, you've seen it! It's remarkable! It's remarkable to watch God take a man's heart and turn it and draw it out unto himself.

Do you know what that does for me? It emboldens me. It encourages me. It enlivens me for the power of the gospel. It makes me want to go out and share it and speak of it even more. You and I get to play a part in this. He could have done it in any way he wanted to, but you and I have a role to play. How good and gracious is our God to say, "Come on. I'm going to move the couch, but come grab a corner. Get over there and watch"? So many of us miss out on the excitement and the power of watching God transform a heart. God's promised plan involves participation.

2. *God's promised plan provides grace.* Listen to this quote by John Hannah. He says this. "Although man is capable of many good things, he is incapable of the necessary thing: meriting the mercy of God." As I look around this room, there are many of you in here who I know and a lot of you who I don't know. Here's what I'm confident about this room. This room is filled with people who are gifted and capable.

There are some of you in here who are teachers, and you're remarkable teachers. You have the unique ability to draw out from your students, whatever form they take, little ones to big ones, and captivate their attention and transfer information, not only so it hits their heads but so it moves their hearts. That's a gift. That's a good gift that many of you have.

Some of you have the ability to architect and build and create. You know where to put the stairs, and you know how to create a flow that begins to make sense, and you can even do it in such a way that there's an artistry to it. Some of you in here are counselors. You have the wonderful gift of taking what is tangled and gnarled and beginning to unwind it and straighten it out for people who cannot see clearly.

Some of you in here are coaches. You have the ability to draw a team in, to rally them around a goal and to move them forward toward that objective. Some of you in here are doctors and physicians' assistants and physical therapists and massage therapists. We're in your hands. You're nurses or you provide healing. What a good gift!

Some of you have business savvy. I could go on and on. As capable as we all may be, here's the sad and daunting reality: if we take all of our good capabilities and we combine them all, we're still incapable of the one necessary thing. There's nothing I can do. I can help 10,000 old ladies across the road. I can save a kitten out of a tree every day for the rest of my life. I could adopt 100 orphans. I could give my life for the cause of the poor.

The Bible is going to say this: none of that will merit the favor of God. None of that will put God into my debt. None of that will earn me a righteousness I need to get out of the mess I'm in. You see, the scary reality of sin is it's not just external to me. It's not just what I do. The scary reality of sin and the problem that started this whole thing in the first place is that it's within me.

It's woven into every fabric and being of my nature, so even if I could clean up that which is external to me, I still wouldn't be able to fundamentally change who I am, and neither can you. Unless grace intervenes, unless a God who can come in and recreate a nature... Unless there is a God who can take my life and make a great exchange where he receives on his back the punishment I deserve and gives to me the righteousness of his Son...

You think of 2 Corinthians 5:21. "He made him who knew no sin to be sin, that in him I might become the righteousness of God." Unless that happens, I'm doomed, and so are you. But here's the remarkable thing about the gospel story. The remarkable thing about the gospel story is it's motivated by a gracious and loving God who extends favor that is unmerited, who extends an offer of forgiveness that is not deserved.

He's saying, "Quit striving! Just cease striving and know I have done this for you! I have earned this on your behalf. I have become what you deserved so you might become what I have." What a gift it is to know I can't work and muster up enough goodness to ever get that, yet he freely offers it. That's why Paul says this at the end of verse 4. "**Grace and peace...**" You know where they come from? They come from God the Father in Christ Jesus our Savior. Grace and peace. So God's promised plan involves participation and it provides grace, and finally...

3. *God's promised plan produces peace.* It produces peace because the problem of sin is finally dealt with, and that problem of sin is dealt with in the sending of the Son where that vertical relationship, the relationship between God and humanity, is finally able to be restored. In that restoration, through the cross of Jesus Christ... That's why Paul says in Romans 5:1, "**Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace...**"

It's not something we need to search for. It's not something we have to look for. We have peace. So my anxious, restless, unsettled heart is finally and forever settled in him because he's the God who never lies, and he says to me, "Josh, you are forgiven." He didn't lie. "Josh, I have you." He didn't lie. "Josh, I will never leave you or forsake you." He's not turning back on that promise. He says, "I see you now as I see my Son," and his words are truth.

All of that reality collides in a heart in such a way that it produces peace. One of the outworkings of that vertical peace is the horizontal peace. Look at this. "**To Titus, my true child in a common faith...**" Titus, a young uncircumcised Greek, and Paul, an older Jewish man... Their paths don't cross. They're not hanging out. They're not exchanging, "**...my true child in a common faith...**"

You see, that's the result of the gospel. In that vertical setting right, there finally becomes the ability to set things right horizontally, where I can love you, you can love me, and we can love one another. Why? Because we have a common faith with a common Savior who has made a way for us to be reconciled, first and foremost to him and then to one another.

The implications of the gospel message are profound. I love what John Calvin said about this gospel truth. He said, "The Son has brought to us salvation from the Father, and the Father has bestowed it through the Son." Here's how I want to close our time. I really want to close our time by reflecting and responding. If you would, just begin to kind of settle your hearts a bit. I want to reflect and respond to God's promised plan.

If you're serving communion, I would ask that you'd just go ahead and get up and start handing out the elements. One of the ways we'll respond to the gospel message today is through communion. Let me say this about communion. Communion is one of those things that is reserved for the Christian. It's reserved for the one who has already received the promised plan of God.

So in that, we're going to hold the bread and we're going to hold the cup, and we're going to be reminded of the broken body and the shed blood of Christ. Here's where I want us to go as we think

about this. I want you to think about God's promised plan and how it involves participation. The first thing I want you to do is just kind of back up from wherever you are on this particular Sunday, and I want you to kind of consider that timeline that stretches from ages past and about which Paul says, "In the hope of eternal life, moving forward to eternity future."

Somewhere along that line, God intervened in your world. Somewhere along that continuum, God stepped into your life. When was that? What did he pull you out of? You think of Psalm 40. "He pulled me out of the muck and the mire, and he set my feet upon a rock and put a new song in my mouth." When was that for you, church? I want you to thank the Lord for it. I want you to remember where you were and who you were and the fact that God has rescued you.

As you're thinking about the promised plan, here's something else I want you to think about. You see, the promised plan involves participation, so I want you to think about who that person was. Who was that person who shared the gospel with you? Who was that man or that woman or that coach or that neighbor or that coworker who faithfully and continually sewed the gospel seeds in your life? I want you to pray for them. I want you to thank the Lord for them.

Maybe it was a dad who faithfully put the gospel before you. Maybe it was a buddy who brought this gospel message to you. It could have been a stranger, a guy you sat next to on a plane or on a business trip or... Who knows? I want you to thank the Lord for that person, and I want you to thank the Lord for the courage they demonstrated, for the faithfulness that they demonstrated to extend to you an invitation and an offer of grace.

As you think about the promised plan, and if you think about those who participated in it with you, as you hold the cup and as you hold the bread, I want you to be reminded of the grace of God that is over your life right now. Hey, Christian, grace is over your life right now. For those of you in this room... I know that in a room this size there are some who are not Christians.

I want to put this before you as well, that no matter how you walked into this room... If you walked in bruised, battered, beaten, tired, dirty, guilty, full of shame, and full of regret, you probably walked in very similar to the rest of us because we're all broken people. We're a busted up people, and if we have projected any sense that we have it all together, forgive us.

You see, we're not a perfect people in here. What we are is a forgiven people, and that offer of forgiveness is extended to you even right now. I love the fact that Paul says, "**...at the proper time**

manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted..." So as we talked about that continuum of God's promised plan, maybe today for you it is that proper time.

Maybe today is the proper time for you to receive for the first time the saving benefits of Christ and what he has done for you on the cross. Maybe today is the first time... Maybe you walked in one way, but you get to walk out forgiven and renewed and redeemed and restored. Your life is not going to be perfect when you walk outside of this room, but your life will walk out under a banner of grace. Just know that gospel invitation is extended to you today.

As you have the elements, take them as you feel led. I'm going to pray, and then Michael is going to lead us in song. Father, thank you for your goodness and your grace. I love how in Titus 3:4 it says, **"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us..."** You saved us!

"...not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to your own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom you 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." We bless you. It's in Christ's name we pray, amen.