

What do we believe?

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[0 : 00] Well, as I said, this evening we are going to start a new series on Paul's letter to Titus. Now, just before I start, for the poor people in the tech booth, I'm going to just turn my slides off because they're not doing something that I want them to do, and I'm just going to bring them up again because I want my pen to work, and at the moment my pen's not working, so hopefully that'll now work.

So my pen should work. There we go. Yes, we are starting a new study on Titus. As I said, Titus was a pastor on the island of Crete. Paul wrote to him to give him instructions for leading the church there.

And our series title is going to be Because We Believe. And that title arises from one of two crucial emphases that we always want to keep in balance as we follow Jesus.

On the one hand, we always want to think about what we believe and why we believe it. But on the other hand, we also always need to think about the impact that our faith should have on our lives.

So we want to think about what we believe and why we believe it, but then we want to think about how that should shape the way all of us should live, as a church family together and as individuals. So in other words, we always want to think about the phrase, we believe because.

[1 : 15] And there's lots of answers to that. We believe because God has given us a coherent, persuasive and captivating revelation in the Bible.

We believe because the gospel addresses the deepest needs and longings and questions that we have. We believe because we've experienced the life-changing power of the gospel.

And most importantly of all, we believe because the Holy Spirit helps us and enables us to do so. There's lots of reasons why we believe, but we cannot stop there.

We cannot just say, we believe because X, Y, Z. And then for that faith to have no impact on our lives.

If that happens, then we're shrinking the gospel. We're drastically shrinking the gospel. Instead, it's so important that alongside being clear about what we believe and why we believe it, we also need to think about how that is going to shape the way we live.

[2 : 22] In other words, as Christians, we believe the gospel. And because we believe, then we want our whole lives to be shaped by it.

And that's one of the big themes in Titus. And that's what we're going to be focusing on. The fact that the way that we live as individuals and as a church family is to be shaped by what we've come to know and believe.

And that's reminding us that healthy discipleship always involves assurance and action. It always involves convictions and consequences.

It always involves doctrine and duty, stuff we know and learn, and then application in our lives. And those two dynamics always stand side by side.

And of course, this is actually just something that's true of every part of life. So I am assured and persuaded that exercise is good for me. But that's useless unless I actually exercise.

[3 : 23] And the same is true of healthy eating, of getting enough sleep, of balancing work and rest. I can be assured and certain of the importance of these things. But I've got to act on those truths.

There's got to be practical application in my life. And that's definitely true in the life of discipleship as we follow Jesus. And that's what Titus is going to teach us about.

Because of what we believe, we want to devote ourselves to the good patterns of behaviour that God wants to see in our lives.

And it's so important to say that we do not do good works in order to be saved. That's just legalism and it's not the gospel.

Instead, we strive to do good works because we believe. And so over the next five or six Sundays, we're going to be thinking about all of this.

[4 : 21] And Paul's letter to Titus will teach us about how the church is organised. It'll teach us about how older and younger generations relate to each other. It teaches us about how to think about work and home life.

How to interact with an unbelieving society around us. It teaches us about what we should prioritise, what we should avoid. And how the gospel should shape our perspective on life and eternity.

Tonight, though, we're going to introduce our series. And we're going to ask the question, well, what do we believe? And as we think about this, we're going to focus on the opening words of chapter one.

Paul, a servant of God, now 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 Saviour, to Titus, my true child in a common faith, grace and peace from God the Father, and Christ Jesus our Saviour.

Now these words are just the greeting that open the letter. And yet, as is so often the case with Paul, these words are so rich theologically.

[5 : 43] And they highlight five key dynamics that lie at the heart of the gospel and that are central to what we believe as Christians.

And we're going to look at them together. So, we believe that the gospel unfolds across redemptive history. We believe that the gospel deals with our origin and destiny. We believe that the gospel combines faith and knowledge.

We believe that the gospel expects inward and outward transformation. And we believe that the gospel bestows privilege and responsibility. We're going to whiz through these together tonight.

So, first of all, thinking about how the gospel unfolds across redemptive histories. Paul speaks about how the gospel gives us the hope of eternal life that has been promised beforehand and has now been manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted.

Here, Paul is highlighting a key aspect of how the gospel works. He's talking about how in the gospel there is promise, fulfillment and proclamation.

[6 : 56] And all of that unfolds across redemptive history. Now, when I use that phrase, redemptive history, what we're saying is that God's plan of salvation, his plan of redemption, unfolds across the ages of history.

So, God doesn't execute a plan of salvation by snapping his fingers and doing everything in a one-er. Instead, he unfolds his plan across the generations of history. That's what we call redemptive history.

That's why the Bible contains so much history and things have been worked out across the generations of human experience. And there's two main eras of redemptive history.

There's the era of promise and anticipation. That's the Old Testament. And then there's the era of fulfillment and proclamation. And that's the New Testament. Now, the New Testament era begins with the coming of Jesus Christ, where all the Old Testament shadows are fulfilled.

But it doesn't end there. It continues until the second coming of Jesus Christ. As the gospel is proclaimed, the church is built, and the nations are reached with the good news of Jesus Christ.

[8 : 08] Now, that unfolding of God's plan over history tells us several important things. It tells us that all of history is under God's sovereign rule.

And so, the God who never lies promised before the ages began. So, we're going right back to the very beginning. And then at the proper time, manifested in his word all that he was going to do and the fulfillment of all his promises.

And then that work continues. It's just teaching us that over every era of history, God is sovereign. Everything, every second of time, every inch of the universe, every ounce of energy, it's all under the sovereign rule of God.

And that also teaches us that every single part of life has meaning and purpose. So, the fact that God is sovereign over all of history means that nothing is pointless, nothing is empty, nothing is irrelevant.

Everything has meaning. And that's why we have categories like good and evil, truth and lies, love and justice. It's the overarching rule of God that establishes these things and means that they're real rather than just illusions or temporary.

[9 : 21] And it's also telling you, this pattern of promise, fulfillment, proclamation, it's also telling you that the gospel is one united, coherent, beautiful plan that all comes together so that you can be saved.

So, when we think about the Old Testament and New Testament, there are some people who try to put a big division between these. And it's almost like, well, the Old Testament was one way of being saved and the New Testament is a new way of being saved.

And some people in history have gone even further where they've said, oh, the Old Testament is one God who's not particularly nice and the New Testament is a different God who's actually better. We don't believe that at all.

We don't divide and separate or put a big wedge between these eras. Instead, we are saying that God's plan is one united plan that is unfolded across these two great eras of the Old Testament and the New Testament, all culminating in the coming of Jesus and in his work on the cross, all so that you can be saved.

And today, we have the amazing privilege of being able to look back over that. And that's why it's actually true to say that it's better to be you than it would be for you to be Abraham or Moses or David or any of the saints in the Old Testament.

[10 : 47] We look back at these great figures and we think, oh, if only to be them, it's actually better to be you. Because they had to look forward with anticipation for what was going to come. We can look back and see that it's been fulfilled.

That's why Jesus could say to his disciples, blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see and did not see it and to hear what you hear and did not hear it.

The Old Testament giants heard the promises, but they had to await their fulfillment. You and I can look back and see that God has kept his word.

Now, that raises a very important point about what we believe. At one level, when we talk about the gospel, we talk about a promise. And that's absolutely accurate in many ways because the gospel is making you a promise.

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. That's a promise for everyone. Come to Jesus. Believe in him. You'll be saved. But it's important that we're very accurate in terms of how we talk about the gospel promise.

[11 : 58] Because when we talk about the promise of the gospel, it's not really that God is making you a promise that we expect him to keep.

It's more accurate to say that the gospel is telling you about a promise that God absolutely has kept.

And that's the amazing thing that, as Paul speaks about this, he speaks about promise and manifestation. Promise and fulfillment. In other words, if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, then you are absolutely safe and secure forever.

Because the unfolding of God's plan across redemptive history, the fulfillment of his promises in the personal work of Jesus Christ means that God is not giving you a hopelessly. God is giving you an absolutely.

You are absolutely safe and secure because in the gospel you are brought into a promise that has been magnificently kept through Jesus. Sometimes we are so often plagued.

[13 : 08] And this is true for Christians and it's true for those who are not yet Christians. We're plagued by the question, have I done enough? Have I believed enough? Do I know enough? Have I understood enough?

Will I be able to do enough? That is not what you need to ask. You need to ask the question, has Jesus done enough?

And the great proclamation of the gospel is that the answer to that question is a massive, eternal yes. And because we believe that, our hearts are at peace.

And all you have to do when you come to Jesus is fall into his arms and rest in him. So the gospel unfolds across redemptive history as the gospel is promised, fulfilled and proclaimed.

The gospel also deals with our origin and destiny. So this stretches us to the very boundaries of redemptive history. And that's what the gospel deals with. It deals with where we have come from.

[14 : 17] And it confronts us with the question of where we are going. Now, in terms of our origin, verse 1 to 4 teaches us something absolutely crucial.

Because when we think about origin, we often will think about creation. And that's absolutely true. The Bible teaches us that we and everything else have been created by God. He is the life-giving creator from which everything else has come.

That's absolutely true. But these verses actually tell you something more than that. Because these verses tell you that you have not simply been made by God, you've been chosen by God.

Verse 1 speaks of God's elect. That language of being chosen. And that's telling you that everyone who is a believer, everyone who becomes a believer, is chosen by God.

And that has something beautiful to tell you about your origin. It's telling you that you are God's choice. He chose to make you. He chose to save you.

[15 : 22] He chose to love you forever. And that means that if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, you are eternally His. And the thing that I want to press into your hearts is that that is true even when you mess up.

Even when you make big mistakes. And even when you stumble along the way. And even when things go far wrong in your life. Even when you stumble and mess up.

You are His. Because when it comes to following Jesus. He never says I'm testing you.

To see if you'll make it and be good enough. Instead every step of the way He says I've chosen you. And you're mine.

And so there's beautiful teaching about our origin. But that reality of God's choice also affects our destiny.

[16 : 27] And that's what gives us the hope of eternal life. That verse 2 speaks about. And that hope of eternal life. That lies at the heart of the gospel.

And at the heart of Christian eschatology as we call it. Has what we call an already not yet balance to it. Now I've written those words lots and lots of times in the screen.

Because I say it quite often. But it's so important to recognize. Because in the Bible. In terms of eternal life. There's an already aspect. There's a not yet aspect. So at one level. We have already entered into that eternal life that the gospel offers.

Jesus said. Truly truly I say to you. Whoever hears my word. And believes him who sent me. Has eternal life. He does not come into judgment. He has passed from death to life. That's a reality now.

For all who believe. And so if you are believing. That's true of you. You start believing right now. That becomes true of you. And that already we enjoy that reality of eternal life in Christ.

[17 : 26] But at the same time. There's a not yet. Because in the age to come. There's the promise of eternal life. In the full consummation of God's kingdom. And the full reality of sin being history for all of us.

And for us to enjoy his presence and peace forever. And so there's already. There's this already and not yet balance. In the gospel.

And the ultimate fulfillment of God's purposes is the new creation. When there is no more sin. No more tears. No more crying. And everything is restored to being good.

And beautiful. And loving. And wonderful. And we are looking forward to that so much. And do you know what the role of the church is now? The role of the church is to be a glimpse of that.

And a foretaste of that. And that's why. You know. Revelation speaks of choir singing. Multitudes singing to God's praise.

[18 : 26] That's why you come into church on Sunday. We sing together to God's praise. That's why the New Testament speaks about the fruit of the spirit. That's why we want to see that in our lives as we live.

So that the beauty and love and joy and peace and happiness of heaven. Is what we see in church every week as we gather. That's what the church is meant to be. And that's why it's so damaging to the church.

When all sorts of patterns of behavior that you see in the workplace. And in the world around you. Sneak into the church. And if we are no different to the world around us. Then we're so far from what God wants us to be.

The church should be a community where love towards God. And love towards one another. Is just so powerful. And it's just a beautiful, beautiful glimpse.

Of what heaven is going to be like. And all of this is reminding us. That in the gospel we have a precious origin. And a beautiful destiny. A precious origin and a beautiful destiny.

[19 : 23] And if anyone here, anyone watching at home. Is not yet a Christian. Surely you want that. Surely you want that. To rest in the knowledge that actually your origin has meaning and purpose.

You're not some accident in a pointless world. And your destiny is beautiful. That's what God wants you to have. And the alternatives are so.

They're awful. The alternatives are just. I don't know. They're just. The alternatives are awful. The promise of the gospel is so beautiful. The gospel gives you the only origin that's going to make sense to your mind.

It gives you the destiny that will blow your mind. The gospel deals without origin and destiny. It also combines faith and knowledge. And you see these two words in verses 1 to 4.

In fact just at the very beginning you see them in verse 1. Paul speaks about the faith of God's elect. And their knowledge of the truth. It's reminding us that Christians have faith and knowledge.

[20 : 31] And I think it's so important to emphasize this. Because people often think that you have to choose between one or the other. But so often today faith is seen as blind. Ignorant. Hopeful.

Maybe even naive. And sometimes people will say. You know well faith is the thing you have. Even when you know that actually what you believe is not true. Or probably not true. And in contrast to that. There's the idea that if you want to have reliable knowledge.

Then you know give up the idea of having any kind of faith in your life. You need to leave that behind. Now that's completely untrue. For at least two reasons.

Firstly because actually when we talk about faith and knowledge. It's so important to recognize that it's impossible to have any of the latter without the former.

So it's impossible to have knowledge without faith. And that's true whether you're reading social media. So you read social media.

[21 : 28] And you know if there's real news. Accurate news. Then you have to believe what you're reading. And if you have.

If there's fake news. And you believe it. Then you're getting inaccurate knowledge. But it's all a question of whether you believe what you're reading in front of you. Whether that's social media. Newspaper.

TV. Anything. You're doing a science experiment. You've got all sorts of means of measuring things. You have to trust their accuracy. You have to trust your ability.

To read and absorb the information that's been presented to you. That's true if you're in a maths problem. You need to have faith that the processes that you're going to follow are consistent. And that's what you see on the piece of paper.

And the connections you're trying to make in your mind correspond. And it's even true if you're debating your own existence. That's a big philosophical question. Do you exist? Well to even be able to ask that question you have to have faith that you exist.

[22 : 24] You have to believe that you can deliberate on these and many other matters. So in the pursuit of any knowledge you're constantly exercising faith. So that's the kind of philosophical reason why these two go hand in hand.

But the theological reason why faith and knowledge go hand in hand is because the Bible never, ever, ever asks you to have blind, irrational, stab in the dark faith.

In the Gospel faith is not blind. It's informed. In the Gospel there is revelation from God. And then there's a response from us.

God reveals himself. We respond to that revelation by trusting him and then growing in our knowledge of him. And as we grow in our knowledge of him we learn more about ourselves and about everything else.

And that's why a disciple is both a believer and a learner. The word disciple doesn't mean believer. It actually means learner. And so we believe to become disciples and as disciples we're learning.

[23 : 29] Faith and knowledge go hand in hand at every step. And as Paul emphasizes here, the faith that we have in God brings us into a deeper knowledge of the truth.

Now that's one of the most important words in this letter and in the whole of the Bible. The Gospel is only ever interested in dealing with the truth.

So the Gospel is not about advice or concepts or ideas or myths. The Gospel is only interested in the truth.

The truth about life, about death, about eternity, about humanity, about morality, about ourselves. And the Gospel stands or falls on the question of truth. And as we said this morning, the central truth to the Gospel is the truth of the resurrection.

And this is where we see an important point that is maybe easy to miss today. The thing we've got to recognize is that the Gospel is not actually offering you something that's going to make you feel good.

[24 : 39] At times it will make you feel good. At times it will make you feel amazing, but not always. Sometimes it's really hard. And sometimes we have struggles and difficulties and doubts and fears.

At times you feel great, not always. The Gospel is not actually offering you something that will feel good. I think before that, the Gospel is offering you something that makes sense.

And I think that is so important to recognize. And so if you ask the question, do you want the Gospel? That's just another way of asking the question, do you want the truth? And the great claim of Jesus was that if you abide in my word, you're truly my disciples.

You'll know the truth and the truth will set you free. And because we believe that God's word is the truth, we want to be learning more and more from it.

Now, it's important to say here that when we talk about faith and knowledge, these are always areas of growth. If I think back to when I became a Christian, I had very, very basic faith.

[25 : 47] And I had hardly any knowledge. And I can honestly say that I think that 99% of what I know as a Christian, I have learned after becoming a Christian.

Because when I became a Christian, all I really knew was that I needed Jesus. And so the knowledge is not a qualification for becoming a Christian.

It's a consequence of living the life of a Christian as you learn and grow. And the same with your faith. And, you know, we start the journey of faith with just a trembling faith and a basic knowledge.

And that's the right starting point. But bit by bit from there, together we grow as believers and learners. So the gospel unfolds across redemptive history.

It deals with our origin and destiny. It combines faith and knowledge. And the gospel expects inward and outward transformation. Paul says that he speaks about the faith of the gods or gods elect and their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness.

[26 : 54] Now, what does that mean, that phrase? Well, I think the big emphasis that's being made here is that Paul is saying that the faith and knowledge that we have doesn't just stay inward. It must transform the way that we live.

And in many ways, that's pointing us to the big thing that we're highlighting in the series. That because we believe in Jesus, our lives are transformed from a lifestyle that takes little or no interest in God to a lifestyle that's devoted to living in his way.

And all of this is grounded in a fundamental emphasis of the gospel. That what we believe inwardly is to shape how we live outwardly.

And that's a massively important topic, but it's also just a core basic of the gospel. So if we trust and love and revere God in our hearts, that should show itself in the way that we live our lives.

In other words, in terms of our love towards God and in terms of our love towards other people, everyone around us should see it before we ever have to see it.

[28 : 09] The fact that we love God and love one another, people should see that in us before we ever tell them that we do it. Now, the minute I say that, my heart is stung with feelings of guilt.

And I can think of all so many examples of times when I failed to do that and when I've mucked that up. But it's a massively important balance for us to try and maintain.

And that's really the big battle that we face in the Christian life. And we want it to be that by God's grace, we live this week of our lives and every week of our lives in a way that displays our devotion to God.

And yes, that's hard and we will make mistakes along the way. But that's the beauty of the life that Jesus is calling us to. And it's all reminding us that the gospel is utterly anti-hypocrisy.

Jesus made that so clear in his teaching. You can see an example there in Mark 6. He's got no interest in people who honour with his lips, but their hearts are far from him. And equally, the opposite is true.

[29 : 13] We can't say, oh, I love Jesus. I've got Jesus in my heart. I love him. But I'm just going to live the way everybody else lives. Instead, the gospel is expecting integrity.

That within us there will be an integrated correspondence between what we believe on the inside and how we live on the outside. And that's why the gospel expects inward and outward transformation.

Now, one crucial thing to remember here is that when we talk about biblical integrity, what's the key to that? What's the key to biblical integrity?

Is it holiness, wisdom, righteousness, maturity? Well, these are all good things, but they're not the key to integrity. The key to integrity is repentance.

Because we will all make mistakes. But that readiness to confess our mistakes, that readiness to say sorry when we mess up, and to openly acknowledge that we are a work in progress, is just to speak God's truth after him, and to show that we are only what we are by the grace and help of God.

[30 : 29] So, the gospel unfolds across redemptive history. It deals with our origin and destiny. It combines faith and knowledge. It expects inward and outward transformation. And last of all, the gospel bestows privilege and responsibility.

And that balance of privilege and responsibility is captured at the words at the end of verse 3. Paul says that at the proper time, that the hope of eternal life was at the proper time, manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour.

Paul has been entrusted with the gospel by the command of God. Now, that word entrusted speaks of an astonishing privilege.

And it actually comes from the same word family as the word faith. So, that word there and that word there are very, very similar in Greek. That's the word pistis, and this is the word pistio.

And so, it's the same word family. And so, in verse 1, it's a noun. God's elect have faith. In verse 3, it's a verb.

[31 : 44] Paul has been faithed with the gospel. En-faithed. En-trusted. In other words, God is trusting Paul and Titus and us to communicate the words of eternal life.

And that entrusting is an amazing, amazing privilege. I don't know if this is maybe a silly example, but my mind, when I was thinking about this, my mind was thinking to a football report that I read earlier in the week.

Aston Villa were playing against Club Bruges in the Champions League. And Aston Villa recently signed a player called Marcus Asensio, who's a superb Spanish player, has had lots of success with Real Madrid, then was with Paris Saint-Germain, two huge teams.

He's now at Aston Villa. That's a bit of a smaller team, but he's doing incredibly well. And Aston Villa got a penalty, and they said that the players got the ball, and they were like, give it to Marco. And they gave it to him because they knew he would score.

They entrusted the penalty to him. And you think, well, what a privilege for him. To be the man entrusted with that moment. I think that's a tiny and beautiful glimpse of the astonishing privilege that the church has in fulfilling the purposes of God.

[32 : 55] God said to Paul, to Titus, and to us, here's my gospel. I'm entrusting it to you. Go for it. That is such a privilege.

It's also a massive responsibility. And that's captured in this word, command. The entrusting is commanded.

And that's such an important balance. The privilege we've been entrusted with stands hand in hand with obedience to our Savior. And that balance of privilege and responsibility runs right through redemptive history, which takes us back to where we started.

It's a key aspect of what it means to be in a covenant relationship with God. He pours out privileges as he saves us.

And he also endows us with responsibilities. And that's key to a healthy relationship of any kind, and especially in a relationship with God.

[33 : 57] And that balance of privilege and responsibility tells you that the gospel is wonderful and serious. The gospel is wonderful and serious.

And that is what makes it so good. Because everything that is good in life is wonderful and serious.

Your family. Your friendships. Your marriage. Your responsibilities as parents.

The leadership roles that you have at work or in the community. Your involvement with charitable work. The healthcare that's provided. Education. The arts.

Sports. Even adventures. Hill walking. Sailing. Whatever it may be. All of that is wonderful and serious.

[35 : 00] And the very best thing that we can ever experience is to come to know Jesus. To follow him. And to share the gospel. And to do so is so exciting.

But it's so convicting. It is utterly amazing. But it is urgent. And it combines overflowing joy.

And overwhelming solemnity. The gospel is wonderful and serious. And what I want you to recognize is that when we think about that.

About privilege and responsibility. What I want you to recognize is that those words. You think privilege and responsibility can sound a bit urre. Especially the responsibility bit.

But the truth is your heart yearns for both of these. And so does mine. Yearning for the privileges of joys that life can bring.

[36 : 10] But also yearning to actually hold responsibility. And to do so well. To carry that role that makes a difference.

And that's part of what makes following Jesus so beautiful and so wonderful. Because in the gospel God bestows privilege and responsibility.

So we're asking the question what do we believe? And these words are reminding us of some of the core truths of the gospel. And as we go through Titus together.

We'll unpack all of these a little bit more. It's just all reminding us that God. God is unfolding his salvation across the whole ages of history for your salvation.

And he does that because your origin is that you are his. And your destiny can be eternity with him. And Jesus died to make that happen. And he is calling you to faith.

[37 : 15] And as you step onto that journey. You will grow in the most beautiful amazing knowledge that we can have. And as that happens. There is inward and outward transformation in our lives.

The old is left behind. The new has come. With the help of the Holy Spirit. We become the people God made us to be. So much so. He bestows on us privilege and responsibility.

As we live for him. It's all a reminder that following Jesus is amazing. That's what we believe. Do you believe? Amen.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus we just thank you so much for the gospel. For just how big and beautiful and magnificent it is.

And we thank you for the way in which your salvation has been unfolded across history. We thank you that you answer the questions of our origin.

[38 : 14] And you give us hope and promise for our destiny. We thank you so, so much that you are transforming people's lives. As we grow in faith and in knowledge.

And we thank you that we can partner with you and serve you. As you bestow us privilege and responsibility. And we pray that everything that we believe would shape the way that we live.

And we pray that the way that we live would be a beautiful testimony to you. And we pray that the result of that would be that more people would come to believe in you as well. Amen.