

Co-ordinates for Christian Living

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[0 : 00] Well, if you have Titus chapter 2 open, please do keep it open. Also the verses will be appearing on the screen.

Let's just read verses 11 to 14 one more time. 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 this present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself to redeem us from all lawlessness, and to purify for himself a people for his own possession, who is zealous for good works.

Well, you might think that Titus chapter 2 is a strange place to go as we think about the birth of Jesus Christ, but actually it's very much an advent passage.

It literally means the coming. And traditionally, often the first four weeks of December are called advent weeks or whatever, advent season. And for centuries, they've been a time of remembering not just Jesus' first coming, but also his second coming, the return of Jesus.

Many of you will know the carol, O come, O come, Emmanuel. It's one of my favorite. And it's a hymn that in many ways longs for Jesus to come, but not just for his first coming, but for his return.

[1 : 27] If you listen carefully to the words, there are words that are looking forward to more than Jesus just coming and starting that work of salvation, but to him coming to complete the work that he started.

It's longing for his return. It's longing for the completion, the fulfillment of all that Jesus does. You see, we live between the ages.

We live in the now but not yet where Christ has come and he has brought salvation to the world. But we also live in the not yet because Christ is yet to return.

He's yet to complete everything. We stand in between. We stand between these two comings that in many ways define the time that we live in.

And that's really important to remember because we live in a world that lacks direction. I don't know whether you've ever find that. Whether you, I don't know, I found that for myself yesterday, just on a day off when I didn't have anything I had to do.

[2 : 27] I was thinking, what am I doing? Just sitting there. What am I meant to be doing today? I feel like I need something to keep myself busy and actually just felt myself just lacking a bit of direction.

I think often actually that's just a symptom of a bigger thing we feel. We're in this vast world and so often we distract ourselves, the emptiness that we can so easily feel we distract ourselves with putting ourselves into our work or with binging on Netflix or something else because we lack direction.

We're so often tossed back and forth like a boat on the waves, whether with joys and sorrows or busyness and turmoil of life. We lack direction.

And any direction that we have is often bound up with events in the past and with our hopes for the future, whether good or bad. And Christians aren't immune to that feeling either.

So we need direction. We need kind of firm points on the compass, firm lights by which to navigate by because whatever bearings we choose in life, whatever points we're looking back on and living from and living for, those things will shape who we are.

[3 : 39] The apostle Paul knew that. When he was writing to Titus, when he's giving advice to Titus to really kind of clear up Crete because Crete had a pretty bad reputation.

I don't know whether you have read much of Titus or know much about Crete, but even just the word cretin is like an insult. That's come long since that comes from the people of Crete.

That's such a bad reputation. And Titus was meant to go there and he's meant to be helping to sort out the island. And we see Paul's desire was that Titus would help transform the churches to be families that were defined by the gospel and shaped by the gospel.

And I wanted us to read just that first part of chapter two, just to see the kind of radical transformation that Paul was hoping that the gospel would make in people's lives.

They'll be full of godly older men and women who are examples and teachers to those who are younger, people who are self-controlled in everything they do. It's really a picture of a quite idyllic church.

[4 : 47] And what's Paul's three-step plan to clean up Crete? It's the gospel, the gospel, the gospel. Again and again in Titus, if you're to read it through, he tells Titus to just teach and exhort people and to declare the gospel.

Why? Because it's God's work that does his transforming work. And chapter two, verse 11 to 14, which is our passage for tonight, really is the core of the whole letter because it explains what that gospel is.

And it explains it in such a way by giving us two coordinates to live by. Two coordinates that can give us direction in this world, in this life.

It gives us a bearing for how to live between the first coming of Jesus and the second coming of Jesus. You can see there in verse 11, he says, for the grace of God has appeared.

We live in light of Christ's first coming. We look back to that. And then we also look forward. Verse 13, we are waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 53] Those are the coordinates for the Christian life and Paul reminds them and he reminds us that only these points will help us navigate through this life.

They'll, though these points, keeping these in mind will help us to train, will help train us to renounce ungodliness and to live holy and upright lives will transform how we live.

That's those points, what would transform, transform the church in Crete and keeping those things in mind is what will transform our lives as well. It's the core, it's the heart of the gospel.

So we're going to spend our time in some ways looking at these two events this evening, looking at the first coming, looking at the second coming and the implications for our lives. So first of all, the first coming, the grace of God has appeared.

Verse 11, Paul says, the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people. The coordinate of our lives then is looking back to the grace of God revealed in Christ and grace is God's free, undeserved favor that he pours out on people like you and me.

[7 : 01] And we know that grace didn't come into existence the moment that Jesus appeared. God has always described throughout the Bible as a gracious and compassionate God. The God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament.

It's just that in Christ we see God in, in color, in 3D. We see God's grace shown in its fullest. We see that in Jesus' humble birth. We see it in his compassionate life.

We ultimately see it in him laying down his life on the cross. So grace is central to the person and work of Christ. So much so that you notice that in verse 11, Paul doesn't say, Jesus appeared, does he?

We might expect that Jesus appeared and we're waiting for him to come again. He says the grace of God has appeared. Grace so defines who Jesus is. It so defines his work that Paul says grace appeared, bringing salvation to all people.

God's grace is most clearly seen in salvation. And he expands on that in verse 14. There's a, you know, if you want a wonderful little summary of the gospel, there it is in verse 14.

[8 : 08] And so Christ gave himself to redeem us and to purify us, to be his people, to be his own possession. Jesus buys grace, redeems, and he purifies.

If we just look at those a bit more closely, redemption is that language of buying someone out of slavery. We kind of most, it would have, for Israelites reading this, they would have thought straight away back to the Old Testament, back to Exodus, where God rescued his people from Egypt and he brought them to the promised land.

So that, you know, maybe if you were a Gentile, if you were one of the Greeks reading this, they would think about the slave market, someone buying someone from the slave market and then setting them free. It's that paying the price, redeeming and setting free.

That's what Jesus does. He sets us free. Sets us free from the power of sin. If the Exodus was a trailer, then Jesus is where the full movie happens.

It's where that's what everything is looking forward to. Because naturally we're bound not in physical slavery, but to the power of sin.

[9 : 14] We're blind to that captivity, of course. Most of us don't realize naturally that we're slaves to sin. So only when Jesus opens our eyes, we see how much we couldn't do what we wanted before.

And only he sets us free to live the lives that God wants us to. But Jesus' work goes further than that. He also reverses the corrupting effect of sin on our lives.

That's that language of purification. And the Old Testament prophets like Ezekiel promised that God would come and he'd make our hearts clean.

You take away all of the wrong desires. He would change hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. That's what Jesus does. He sets us free, but he puts new desires into our hearts.

It's just to illustrate that. Imagine you've bought a new house and sometimes the previous owners of a house don't clean it up properly. And you go into the attic and it may not be cash in the attic, but there's a bunch of rubbish there that you've still got to clean now and put in the skip.

[10 : 17] And in the attic you find a bowl. There's nothing special about that bowl. Just a metal bowl. And you get that bowl and you tip out all of the rubbish and the cigarette ends and the other stuff that's been in it.

And then you set to work chipping off the rust and shining it down with emery paper and polishing it and then giving it pride of place on your table and maybe putting a bit of fruit in it.

Well, that's maybe just a little picture of what God does with us when he redeems us. He plucks us out of the rubbish. And he doesn't just then leave us rusting in the back of a garage.

He then polishes us. He purifies us. He changes our minds and our hearts until we're clean from sin, until we're washed of the corrosion of sin in our lives.

And then he fills us with his perfect desires and makes us something useful for him. That's maybe a picture of what Christ's work does, redeeming us and purifying us and making us his precious possession.

[11 : 22] And it's all of grace. You see, we're no more attractive than a rusty old salad bowl and God has no more need of us than we might need three or four salad bowls. God doesn't need us.

It's all of grace. It's undeserved. But he's a God of grace. And so he sets his love on us and he redeems and purifies us.

Notice though that Jesus says, or not Jesus, so Paul says to Titus that he redeems us from lawlessness. That helps us just to have a little bit more of an understanding of the depth of what Jesus does.

We might not use that word lawless often, but it was really a perfect word to describe the island of Crete. I mentioned that it wasn't, it didn't have a great reputation.

If you have a Bible open, you can look down to chapter one, verse 12, where Paul quotes one of the poets from Crete. He says, who says Cretans are always liars, evil beasts and lazy glutton.

[12 : 21] Imagine if that was like what everyone's opinion was of, I don't know, Carl away or or point. There's some people from point here, you know, everyone thinks are the evil beasts, lazy glutton.

No, you would not want that to be your reputation. And Paul says, yeah, some of you were like that, but you're not anymore because Jesus has redeemed you and he's purified you.

They were well known to be the bad bunch, but there's nothing that is too much for God's grace. And you can probably look back on your own life, some of you, those of you who have come to trust in Christ.

And you can think about the times when you were slaves to sin, back when you couldn't stop your life matching your reputation. That was the case for the people living in Crete.

But then the grace of God appeared. And look how, and you could imagine Paul saying to them, look, look how God's grace has set you free from sin. You know, look how he's purified and transformed your lives.

[13 : 22] This is a letter to encourage them about the grace of God has appeared and all the difference that it's made in their lives. I mean, just, just glance over Paul's, I mean, if you have your Bibles open, you could glance over the description that Paul gives of the elders.

He sets a suddenly a high bar. He says that the elders in the church are to be hospitable, lovers of good, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. All of those things opposite to what the Cretian reputation was.

But that's not too high of a standard for Paul to set because he knows the grace of God has appeared, redeeming and purifying. And these guys who are once evil beasts and lazy glutton or whatever other stereotype would define them.

They're completely changed by God's grace. That's the gospel that Titus needed to be reminded of as he was feeling discouraged. As he was thinking how on earth is this island going to change for him?

That's the gospel we need to be reminded of. First as we see it, at first as we see God's work in our own lives, it's so easy to, to think, you know, I haven't changed much.

[14 : 28] We might think of ourselves and we look back in the past six months and we think, what difference, what's changed? I still feel as bad as I was before. I still struggle with sin as much as I was before.

But it's helpful then to think back. The grace of God has appeared. It has been teaching me to renounce ungodliness and to live a holy and upright and godly life.

And we don't have to be, you know, a murderer turned preacher to see God's work in our life. The apostle Paul himself, he describes it, he was one of the strictest adherents to God's, to the law.

He wouldn't, we, the apostle Paul probably would have described himself as a good moral person beforehand. But yet he himself says that at one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.

Even those of us who have, in our pre-Christian days, would have, could described ourselves as, I don't know, morally good people. Even then we'll be able to think back and see how actually we're really enslaved to our own passions.

[15 : 40] That try as we might those things that we pursued that we thought would give us life never would. And as early when God's grace came, that he opened our eyes to see that all these things, all these avenues were just dead ends.

And he set us free from those desires that we couldn't get away from. And set us free to pursue Christ instead.

Even those of us who, like me, I can't remember a time when I wasn't following Jesus and then am following Jesus. All of us will be able to see the fingerprints of God's grace as it were on our lives.

And just, you know, the ways in which we've, the sin that we once, I don't know, that once clung to us. Like vines wrapping around us. Over the years, God teaches us to say no.

Those are markers of God's grace in our lives. That's proof that God's grace has appeared and is shaping and changing our lives, even though sin continues to be a battle.

[16 : 40] But we still know that the grace of God has appeared because God is helping us to fight sin. He's helping us to say no. All of us will be able to testify to his purifying work as well in helping us to long for, in long for the things that God loves.

You know, why else would we love things God loves and hate things that God hates? It's only by God's work in our hearts that would happen. Naturally, that would never happen. We'd want to do things that are good for us and that give us the most pleasure or whatever.

Only God's grace would change our hearts. Brothers and sisters, we look back on how God's grace has appeared in our lives. That's the first pillar we need to remember.

That's the first coordinate we need to remember if we can have direction in life. But we also need to look forward. We need to see that second pillar, that second light on the horizon, which is the second coming of Christ.

The glory of God will appear. In verse 13, Paul says that we're waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[17 : 50] When the Son of God first appeared, the apostle John says that we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only full of grace and truth. Jesus revealed his glory in the miraculous signs that he did.

When he raises Lazarus from the tomb, he says that this is so that you can see my glory. There's a sense in which when Jesus was on this earth that people did see glimpses of his glory and all that he did, but it was still veiled.

They still didn't quite realize who it was. When Jesus comes again, his glory will be seen. No one will be able to deny that Jesus is God, that Jesus is the King.

His glory will be there for all to see. The apostle John in Revelation says, behold, he is coming and every eye will see him. When Jesus returns, he won't return as the helpless babe, but as the victorious King.

That's why Paul says to Titus, our Savior's return is our hope. He says we're waiting for our blessed hope, our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[19 : 00] It's a certain hope. I think often we think of a hope as something like, I hope it doesn't rain and then it does. Whatever it is, I hope my car doesn't break down and it does.

This is a certain hope. Christ's return isn't something of vain hope, they were really just crossing our fingers and hoping that he's going to return because life might feel pretty rubbish right now.

Christ's return can't be stopped by a pandemic or a cold snap or a cost of living crisis or whatever. Jesus' return is absolutely written down as a certain event in the future that will happen.

We don't know when, but Christ will return. Paul calls it a blessed hope, which I think is interesting. Why is it a blessed hope? Why is it so brilliant that Christ will return?

Well, throughout Titus, Paul talks about hope as an eternal hope. As a hope of eternal life. You see, when Jesus returns, he's going to complete everything that he started.

[20 : 03] Right now we see all of the start of Christ's work in bringing us to know him, in opening our eyes to see what is true.

When Jesus returns, he's going to complete all that work. He's going to usher in the age of eternal life where sin and death are no more, when there's no more grieving, when there's no more crying, when there's no more pain.

All the things that define this age in many ways, that will be no more. In many ways, it's also a blessed hope because it's where all of the struggles of being a Christian are going to be gone as well.

Even though right now we have been freed from sin, because Christ has redeemed us, we still struggle with sin, don't we? We still feel those tendrils of temptation reach out and grab us all the time.

Christ's return is our blessed hope because when he returns, that's going to be no more. Never again are we going to have those sins that keep biting us in the back come to us.

[21 : 07] Never again are those memories that bring constant pain, those scars that are written across our lives. Those aren't going to be called to mind anymore.

Christ's return is a blessed hope because he makes all things new. All of those hurts, all of the brokenness that comes from sin will be done away with.

It's also a blessed hope because it promises perfection. I think we so much struggle in the Christian life. We know that God wants us, God gives us standards.

He wants, it gives us standards to live by, for us to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. We struggle with that each day. Maybe we long to, maybe we start the new year thinking, next year, that next door neighbor that I really struggle to get on with, I'm going to get better at loving them.

I'm going to be more self-controlled or I'm going to be less angry. We have these right virtues that we want to grow in and we keep struggling in.

[22 : 09] When Jesus comes again, we're going to be perfectly purified. God, we're going to be able to love God with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength.

All of those, he's going to bring us, he's going to make us who we've been created to be so that we're perfectly like Christ. All of the flaws that we see in ourselves, all of the things we don't want others to see, that's all going to be gone.

We're going to be completely purified in the light Christ. I think the hymn, come thou, found captures that hope really well. I don't know whether you know that hymn.

Let me just read this, the final verse to you. It says, Oh, that day when freed from sinning, I shall see thy lovely face, full of raiment in bloodwashed linen, how I'll sing thy sovereign grace.

Till I'm my Lord no longer tarry, bring thy promises to pass, for I know thy power will keep me till I'm home with thee at last. So that first line, isn't it? Oh, that day when freed from sinning, Christ's return is a blessed hope because we know we'll be completely free from sin.

[23 : 15] We know we'll be like Christ. Well, the grace of God has appeared. The glory of God will appear. Those are the two coordinates for Christian living.

Those are the two great advance that define our world, that will shape how we live in this present age. Paul's aim for Titus and for the churches in Crete is that keeping those two things in mind will completely transform our lives.

They'll help us to live, he says, in verse 12, lives of godliness in this present age. I just want to spend the rest of our time briefly looking, thinking about how that happens.

How does keeping Christ's two comings in mind actively shape our Christian life? Because it's all well and good to say, look at what's happened, that Christ has redeemed us. Look, Christ is returning.

Isn't that good news? But how does that actually shape our lives? How are those things actually the solution to us growing in godliness? And the key word comes in, in verse 12, and let me just read verse 12 again.

[24 : 19] So 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.

That key word there is training. And notice it doesn't say that we're the ones doing the training, it's that God's grace trains us. God's grace that has appeared, the glory of Christ, that God that will appear, it's God's grace that trains us and changes our lives.

A 19th century pastor, Hay Etkin, wrote a book called The School of Grace, all about this passage. And in it he says, grace not only saves us, but it undertakes in our training.

So all Christians become learners in the school of grace. And just as an aside, I think that's really helpful. I think so often in the Christian life we can think, well, God saves us and then it's up to me to just try to obey his commands, to live the Christian life and stay in his naughty book rather than the naughty book.

But that's not the case at all. When God saves us, it's all of grace, all through our Christian life. God doesn't do away with us and let us off on our own.

[25 : 35] It's grace from the beginning to end. He preserves us the whole time. And grace gives us, teaches us two lessons there in verse 12.

First of all, to renounce negatively. NIV is really helpful here. It says training us literally to say no to ungodliness. And I find that really helpful.

It's such a powerful phrase. You teach us to say no to ungodliness. Because I think when faced with sin, so often we can, I don't know, we can make excuses, we can make concessions, we can play with fire.

Very simply, we're just told, grace teaches us to just say no. To just stop it right there. And also enables us to say no.

The fact that we can say no is quite amazing. You know, for so long, if we're not trusting in Jesus, we can't say no to sin. We're just trapped.

[26 : 32] We're just enslaved. Grace enables us to say no to sin and then it teaches us, says you're free, you can now say no to sin. You can now live a life for Christ.

You're not chained to that sin anymore. How does this, how does grace train us then to live self-controlled upright and godly lives?

That's what comes next. Well, grace teaches us godliness in the present by reminding us of how it transformed us in the past. Let me just say that again. Grace teaches us godliness in the present by reminding us of how it transforms us in the past.

So grace reminds us to put it another way that Christ has redeemed us from sin. That sin no longer has any power over us. As we remember Christ's death on the cross, as you remember what his grace has done, so we realize I'm free.

I can say no. I am purified. Christ is purifying me. He is making me more like Christ. I can live in a way according to his commands and that process will be completed when he comes again.

[27 : 41] We look back to Christ's grace. That trains us. We enroll ourselves in the school of grace, you might say. When we let those two points become the direction of our lives.

There's so many points that can define us. I don't know. It can be some significant events in our past, whether good or bad.

I often, people ask, ask something about me and I'll say, well, I was where I'm from. I was born in Nepal. That's as a defining part of my life. Another big defining thing in my future will be, well, hopefully I'll have God willing, I'll have a baby, my wife will give birth and there'll be a baby born in March.

Those will be defining points, significant points in our lives. We're all going to have points that shape our lives. Important thing is that we have the right points in many ways.

If those two things completely defined me, I would still be all at sea. I would still be rocked all about because Nepal changes. I go back there and visit and realize it's not home anymore.

[28 : 45] Any family that we put and that's never going to be completely foundational. That can get rocked all the time. The only two certain things that we can navigate between are the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ.

It's as we keep looking back and looking forward that our direction is made straight. See, every day the compass of our hearts is just going to shift away.

We're going to forget those two points and that's why we need to keep coming back to God's Word. God's Word aligns us instead with those points instead of being distracted, instead of being drawn instead to the desires of the world.

We just needed to preach the gospel, the people in Crete needed to hear the gospel because when we hear God's Word, it readjusts the compass of our hearts. Through hearing the Bible story of redemption, we remember what God has done.

Remember what He will do. It reminds us of His grace and His glory. That happens when we read God's Word at home. That happens when we hear God's Word read at church as we sing God's Word together.

[29 : 55] Every time that happens, every time we hear Scripture, every time we speak about God's Word with each other, whether it's over tea and coffee after the service, whether it's going over someone's house for a cup of tea, every time that happens, our hearts are corrected as it were.

That's why it's so important just to read God's Word every day because you'll know as well as I do that it doesn't even take a day for our hearts to become, to leave true north and just become attracted instead to everything else.

The world steers us off course, doesn't it? We need God's Word to constantly correct us, to constantly remind us of those two points.

Everything I've said also has a corporate element to it, doesn't it? We're not solo Christians. We need one another in this Christian life.

We see in this school of grace, Titus, and we see this in that whole chapter two that I read. That's why I wanted to read it again. You see, just before all of this, Titus says, older men, you're to be teaching younger men, older women, you're to be teaching younger men and women.

[31 : 03] We need one another to be reminded of these things. Otherwise we'll forget. Otherwise we'll forget what direction we're going. Other things will pop up, will become fixated on the things in our past, whether good or bad, or our hopes will all be set on the wrong things in the future.

We need those constant reminders from each other about that Christ has come. That can happen in, often we're bad at seeing God's grace at work in our lives.

Often it takes someone else coming alongside us and pointing out the ways in which we've grown, the ways in which God is shaped and is changing us for the good.

We can encourage each other. I think it's so easy to get frustrated about things, to grumble, to see problems with other people, to see all the ways in which they still need to grow, all the ways in which they're not like Jesus.

One of the best things we can do is to encourage one another by showing each other the ways in which God has changed us and has made us more like Christ.

[32 : 07] Yeah. Anyway, we live just to close then. We live in a world that's lacking direction, don't we? We need to get our bearings. Those bearings will shape who we are, but the grace of God has appeared in Jesus Christ.

The glory of God will appear when he returns. So let's set our course, as it were, by those two things, training and waiting until Christ returns, until God our Savior himself returns to take us to be with him.

So pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you haven't left us without direction in this life.

Lord, we know that so often we can feel direction less, that so often we can self-medicate by busy ourselves and everything else.

Lord, we pray that you would wake us from that and that you'd re-anchor us in your word.

[33 : 12] You'd help us to remember that the only thing that matters in many ways is that Christ has come and that he is returning and that that changes everything.

Lord, we thank you that that gives us great hope, that frees us, that gives us life. Lord, we pray that you'd help us to live as your people holy and upright lives because the grace of God has appeared and waiting and hoping with eager expectation for Christ to return.

Lord, may we remember those things for this Advent season. In Jesus' name, amen.