

Look What God Has Done

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- [0 : 0 0] Titus chapter 3, and Kara, will you please read one down through verse number 8. 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 the 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.
- Thank you. There are many important questions in this life. Why am I here?
- [1 : 2 3] What is the meaning of life? What do I want to be when I grow up? Will I marry or will I stay single?
- Where should I live? When do we eat? Because of its eternal importance, there is one question that warrants more careful consideration.
- More careful consideration than all of these other questions, and that is this question. How can I be right with God? How can I be right with God?
- This question confronted our ancestors, Adam and Eve. Moments after that first bite of forbidden fruit entered their mouths, they feel guilt and shame, and they sew fig leaves together, and they hide from God.
- Why do they hide from God in this way? Because they don't have an answer to this question. How can I be right with God?
- [2 : 4 2] Some say that the way to being right with God is by following the golden rule. Doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- Others say that the way to God is through continuous improvement. Just keep doing more. Keep trying harder. Keep being better.
- Get yourself on God's good side. Clean up your life. Perhaps God weighs the good things we do against the bad things that we do.
- In which case, we all best hope that good things weigh more than bad things. Whatever that means. Some say the answer to the question, how can I be right with God, is this.
- Do your best, and God will do the rest. As though the way to God is some kind of a cosmic partnership where I just do everything I can to be right with him, and God will make up the difference.

[3 : 49] Whatever I am lacking, whatever the gap is, he'll take care of it. But only after I have done my best. The question then becomes, how good do I need to be?

And of course, what if my best isn't good enough? Is there a gauge that tells me how good I'm doing? Like some sort of a pop-up notification on your phone or your watch telling you that you have completed the exercise challenge for the day.

We get something like that? Because today you've done more good than bad. Your good is outweighing your bad. Your best is almost good enough and God's ready to make up the difference.

What if I have a bad day? What if I have a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day? Is God just going to pat me on the back and say, that's all right?

It's okay. Just try harder tomorrow. Be better tomorrow than you were today. In order to answer this question, how can I be right with God?

[5 : 04] Let's turn our attention to scripture. And there we will find the answer. And the answer is that God saves guilty sinners, not great partners.

Are you ready? Okay. When Paul sails away from the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea, he leaves behind a faithful disciple named Titus.

And Paul sends Titus this letter in order to instruct him and direct him and encourage him. And after a warm greeting, Paul reminds Titus of his primary ministry objective.

Titus, I want you to finish up the work that we started and appoint elders in every city to serve the churches. Look at chapter one of the book of Titus in verse five.

This is why I left you in Crete. 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.

[6 : 08] Now, I don't know how Titus feels about Paul's direction to appoint elders. But I can tell you how I would feel. Very overwhelmed.

Especially when you consider the people who are on the island of Crete. I imagine Titus looking around and having a face something like this.

Do you remember what that is, kids? That's a grimace. Where are we going to find elders? Among this group of people?

See, the problem is that the people of Crete have a reputation. They are notoriously beastly. Do you remember that from the book of Daniel? They are notoriously beastly.

Violent, vulgar, and villainous. Look at verse 12. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars.

[7 : 19] Evil beasts, lazy gluttons. And Paul adds his confirmation. This testimony is true. Titus, appoint elders to serve the churches.

Titus is looking around and seeing these beastly Cretans. Villainous and vile. Wondering, where in the world are we going to find elders to serve God's people?

How will Titus respond? How will he respond to Paul's direction? Hey, you guys, I want you to start treating others like you want to be treated.

Y'all better hope your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds. It's time to start doing your best so that God only has to do the rest.

Can we reduce being right with God? Having a right relationship with God? Can we reduce this to behavior modification?

[8 : 30] The way that you might train a dog? Bad dog. Don't do that again. Oh, such a good boy.

Here's a treat. Is this how we are going to find elders in Crete? Through some kind of behavior modification? At first glance, the beginning of chapter 3 seems like that may be true.

Look at verse 1 again. 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.

Lists of rules, lists of behaviors, lists of ways that you, things you should do or not do, inevitably, eventually lead to one of two ends.

First is believing that you are keeping the rules pretty well, at least better than most people. We would call that pride.

[9 : 58] Or second, failing to keep these rules, which leads you to nagging doubt. If all we have is this list of behaviors to go on, if all we have is some kind of behavior modification plan, if that's how we understand the way of salvation, if that's how we see the gospel, then we will find ourselves in one of two places.

Either puffed up with pride because we grossly overestimate ourselves, or buried in debilitating uncertainty because we constantly are wondering, have I really done my best?

And is my best good enough? What if God is unwilling to make up the gap? Kids, do you know what an indictment is?

Hmm. No? Maybe some of you do? Here's an indictment. If you're watching the news at all right now, this word is thrown around quite a bit.

An infamous person has recently been indicted. An indictment is evidence and formal charges against you.

[11 : 26] In our country, it means that a jury of your peers has seen enough evidence for you to be charged with a crime.

This is an indictment. It's evidence and formal charges of wrongdoing. If your answer to the question, how can I be right with God, begins with your doing.

then you have misunderstood the purpose of God's law. God's law is not a checklist of to-dos or achievements in order to enter heaven.

God's law is an indictment against you. It is evidence that you have not measured up to his standard.

that you are not holy as he is and cannot ever be holy enough to warrant his love, to deserve his love.

[12 : 35] God's law is evidence that your best efforts have not, cannot, and will not make you fit for heaven. Because God's law is not a list of to-dos or achievements, then we can say this with certainty.

You cannot be right with God by suppressing your anger or your lust or your disobedience or your covetousness. You cannot be right with God by doing more good than bad.

You cannot be right with God by simply being better than someone else around you that you look at and you say, well, at least I'm not as bad as that person. Here's the problem.

The sinful corruption of Adam's sin in the garden lives deep inside of every human heart. And that sinful nature, that flesh inside of you leads to sinful behavior.

You may even want to do what is right. You may think that you want to do what is right, but in your own strength, you can't. You can't do what is right, at least not for long.

[13 : 47] And certainly not consistently. Listen to what Paul says in Romans chapter 7. For I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh.

For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

Here's Paul. Late in his Christian life, I believe. With the Spirit inside of him. And yet acknowledging, I can't do what I want to do.

How about us? Prior to faith in Jesus. Prior to receiving the Holy Spirit. Do we have any hope of even desiring to do what God asks of us?

Look what Paul writes next to Titus in verse 3. For we ourselves were once foolish.

[15 : 04] Do you remember that, kids? Sin makes you foolish. Foolish. 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.

What are we like apart from God? We are foolish foolish in our sin. We are self-indulgent. We are self-centered. And we are self-destructive.

And not only that, we are bent on destroying others around us as well. Do your best and God will do the rest.

This is a lie. This is a lie. You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that makes it necessary.

[16 : 13] God isn't motivated to save sinners because we have proven to be such great partners in the plan of redemption. God is motivated to save sinners by his undiluted love and generous mercy.

Look at verse number 4. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us.

He saved us. He saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.

Can we wrestle with the word mercy for a moment? Sometimes we may be tempted to think that mercy is when God somehow sweeps our sin under a big rug.

and just sort of hides it and gets rid of it so that we don't have to deal with it. That is not a biblical definition of mercy.

[17 : 44] Mercy is God's love that causes him to show kindness to those who deserve his wrath. mercy is God's love that causes him to show kindness to those who deserve his wrath.

Mercy moves God towards a sinner and motivates him to show kindness hear this because the evidence against the sinner demands judgment.

that's mercy. All of the evidence against you deserves judgment. We're expecting judgment to fall on sinners and when judgment doesn't fall it is because God's love has moved him to action to show kindness such that sinners who deserve because of the evidence against them to be punished for their sin they do not receive that punishment that that is mercy.

Some say that salvation can be illustrated this way a sinner is like a person who is out in the middle of the ocean treading water bobbing up and down a little bit but doing okay there in the middle of the ocean and suddenly realizes that he's about ready to run out of strength and this sinner this swimmer begins calling out help help help help I need so much help someone help me bobbing up and down in this ocean and god in this illustration throws the sinner a life preserver and if the sinner will just grab hold of the life preserver do their best then god will do all of the rest and drag them to safety like some kind of a cosmic partnership this is not the story that the bible tells this is not the gospel here's the problem with that illustration you and i we think much too highly of ourselves you don't comprehend the devil's treachery the corruption of sin or the deceitfulness of your own heart so let me try to rework that illustration biblically!

You were a corpse on the bottom of the ocean God could have left you there death is what you deserve but God's love overflows in mercy and so God sends Jesus Jesus dives into the sea of your sin swims to the bottom of it grabs your rotting bloated corpse and powerfully drags you to the surface gently but firmly lays you on the beach and breathes into you his Holy Spirit and as you take your first gasp of eternal life you cry out

[21 : 57] I am a guilty sinner Jesus save me that's the gospel you cannot save yourself he saved us your salvation is owed entirely to God's grace displayed in his generous mercy achieved by his perfect sons atoning death on the cross and applied to your heart by the powerful life giving work the irresistible power of the Holy Spirit that overcomes even your stubborn unbelief verse five 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 what is justification well remember God's law is like an indictment it is evidence and formal charges that you do not measure up that you have fallen short of God's glory that your sin deserves God's wrath justification then is God's verdict on the matter justification is not what you do nor is justification what God does justification is something that God says about you it is his verdict how does this verdict read

I find my son Jesus guilty of committing your sins against me I have punished him fully and completely my justice is satisfied my wrath is gone Jesus paid for your sin therefore I the judge declare you sinner not only innocent of committing those sins against me but positively righteous because of my son's flawless obedience there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ this is justification God declares a sinner righteous on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done his spotless life his atoning death this is justification friend apart from the cleansing life giving work of the spirit work that we have just considered a couple weeks ago from

John chapter 16 apart from the Holy Spirit's work if God offered you a one way ticket to heaven you would rip the ticket up into tiny pieces spit on it throw it back in God's face scream at him leave me alone and turn and go the other way this is the nature of our sin this is our desperate need for the Holy Spirit to give us life to overcome our stubborn unbelief to cleanse and renew when you have turned and walked away after throwing the one way ticket that you spit on in God's face and screaming at him to leave you alone in that very moment

God's love rises up inside of him and motivates him to move towards you this is mercy mercy is God's love put into action towards those who deserve judgment grace is God's love put into action towards those who've done nothing to earn or deserve it God saves sinners who could not and would not lift a finger even to save themselves God sent his only son to the cross to reconcile guilty sinners to himself and then adopt them into his family as heirs look what God has done how can

[27 : 54] I be right with God Paul tells us in Romans 10 call upon the name of the Lord Jesus and you will be saved ask God to show you mercy receive his grace believe that Jesus has fully paid the price for your sin followers of Jesus I wonder if you have nagging doubts about your salvation did I say the right words did I pray the right prayer did I believe hard enough am I doing enough if you have these nagging doubts if you feel insecure about your salvation this text gives you the remedy it's those three little words in verse five he saved us nothing that you have done nothing that you have said nothing that you have prayed accomplishes your salvation nothing makes your way to God it is

God who saves us when your doubts nag at you like children at the park late in the afternoon on a hot summer day who are thirsty for water and your doubts nag at you like that take yourself back to God's word find right here in Titus chapter three and verse five he saved us he saved me let God's word and the Holy Spirit deal with your nagging doubts it is not by works of righteousness that we have done or continue to do no he saved us because of his mercy when you wrestle with doubt and you wonder am I really one of

God's children ask the Holy Spirit to settle these truths deep in your heart you were saved by grace and grace alone not because of anything you did you are saved right now by grace and grace alone not because of anything that you are doing all of your salvation from beginning to end is God's work he saved us look look what God has done let's humbly rest and confidently hope faithfully obey and joyfully worship our God who saves guilty sinners not great partners let's pray oh great God of highest heaven would you occupy our lowly hearts we are distracted by so many things and one thing is necessary to sit at the feet of

Jesus to hear his words of hope and comfort and encouragement to listen to his truth and to believe would you help us would you help us to say like the man who comes to Jesus needing help Lord I believe help my unbelief father perhaps this morning by the power of God the Holy Spirit you would be pleased to draw some sinner to yourself we ask that you would do this for your glory and their good father perhaps you would be pleased this morning by the power of the

Holy Spirit to overcome their stubborn unbelief and to cause them to repent and to believe this gospel the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ father perhaps today you would settle it in the heart of some follower of Jesus that their salvation is owed from start to finish to what you have done and continue to do and it is entirely apart from their works of righteousness thank you for holding us fast even when we feel like our faith may fail as we sometimes sing blessed Holy Spirit would you please move in our hearts right now as we prepare to celebrate communion together where there is conviction necessary please convict of sin and righteousness and judgment where we need comfort and encouragement and hope please give us that father please continue to stir up our faith cause us to believe more and more give us fresh wonder at what you have done help us to consider deeply what is mercy and if we don't have an answer to the question how can

[35 : 16] I be right with God would you please grant that answer today we look to you help us as we continue to worship in Jesus name