

Titus 2:11-15

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 December 2012

Preacher: Derek Carr

[0 : 00] Titus in chapter 2, there hiding away in chapter 2, in the middle of the chapter, towards the end of the chapter, are these wonderful verses. Titus chapter 2 and verse 11.

We're just going to look at verse 11 tonight. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

While we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. Who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

These then are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. And don't let anyone despise you. The advent of the grace of God.

Well, if ever there was a time of year when people felt religious and weren't perhaps embarrassed by Christianity and Christian things and were even prepared to identify with Christian symbols.

[1 : 25] It could be, couldn't it? This time of year as we begin the season of Christmas. I think it's a time of year when some of those people who in the census called themselves Christian.

What is it? 60, 70% of the population call themselves Christian. It's about that this time of year that some of them sort of come out of the woodwork and are prepared to say, and associate themselves with the Christian church.

I think for many contemporary Brits it's still part of our culture to call ourselves Christian.

Whether we're Christians or not. And especially so at Christmas. Those childhood memories come flooding back, don't they, for many people at Christmas. Where they remember Christmas's past.

They remember things that used to happen in their family traditions. Those, first of all, those non-religious traditions of family. You know, those sort of things I'm talking about.

[2 : 31] Being woken up at three o'clock in the morning. Christmas morning with the words ringing in your ear. Has he been yet? Or being woken up after the Queen's speech.

Because you're still recovering from your Christmas dinner. Hmm. Are opening your presents after dropping hints. To find that now you've got three copies of Nigella Lawson's latest cookbook.

Can't wait, can't he? But there are Christian traditions as well, aren't there? At no other time of year, I think, are the traditional churches full.

Or approaching being full. It's still true for many people, especially where we come from in Lincolnshire, that being Christian is about the baptism of babies and, sorry, the christening of babies.

And the confirmation as a teenager. And marriage in church and a church funeral. It has to do with holidays like Christmas. And songs like carols. And stories like nativity.

[3 : 39] And food like turkey and all the trimmings. I'm going to call that, though, cultural religion. I was talking to one of my students on Friday afternoon. She's a Hindu, she is.

From Dutch extraction. She's called Lata. And she was telling me how great it is that they can't just celebrate Diwali. But she can celebrate Christmas.

And she can't wait to get her Christmas presents. It's all just cultural, isn't it? And our Muslim and Hindu families, you know, many of them, many of them just get involved.

It's the thing to do at Christmas. Because there's the issue, isn't it? You see, suppose I suggest that actually Christmas is really about someone called Jesus Christ.

And he's the son of God. And he's God come in the flesh. And he appeared on earth about 2,000 years ago. And brought salvation.

[4 : 46] And was crucified about 30 years later for the sins of the world. And then raised from the dead. I think many people would be absolutely flabbergasted.

Really? Is that true? But our text tells us. It makes no apologies.

The Bible makes no apologies. Like that. The grace of God appeared. The grace of God brought salvation. And the grace of God came for all men.

Three very, very straightforward, simple things to get a grip of. Very profound ideas. The grace of God first, then, appeared.

This word appeared. There it is in the text, in verse 11. The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared. It's a great word.

[5 : 48] It describes in Greek the rising of the sun on the eastern horizon to herald a new day. It's a word of history. It's a word of history. It's a word of design.

It's a word of prophecy. It's a word of promise. It's a word of intent. That there's a pattern and a design to the world that God has created. Because every morning the sun rises in the east and heralds a new day.

Appeared. And Paul is saying that the appearance of Jesus Christ was no accident. It was of the design and the intent and the plan and the promise of God.

That he brought it about. Having planned and purposed it in eternity. The grace of God appeared.

It meant a new time. A new day in history. It was the turning of history. As this new day of God appeared.

[6 : 58] When we look at the birth of Jesus, we're at a turning point in the history of the world. God is making something new happen for the first time. The birth is no ordinary birth because the baby boy is no ordinary child.

This is God. Come down. Because there's no way we can reach up to him. David Wells has put it well in this quote.

Beneath all spiritualities is the idea that sin has not intruded upon the relation between the sacred and human nature. That human nature offers unblemished access to God. Gone are the days when people understood that an avalanche had fallen between God and human beings.

And that human nature retained its shape made in the image of God. But has lost its relationship to God. And stands in pained alienation from him. That's where we are. We stand in alienation from the living God.

The idea that we can reach up to God is false. Because sin has intruded into our world. And although sin has intruded, this moment, the day Jesus appeared, is the moment when God begins to deal with sin.

[8 : 16] And the coming of Jesus, the sinless Son of God, doing for us what we could never do for ourselves. And look how he appeared. Think about how he appeared.

He said, There in the dusty backwater of poverty stricken Nazareth.

That's how he appeared. He's no remote Jesus, meek and mild. This is Jesus, the real Jesus. He's not the Jesus of my Sunday school pictures.

Airbrushed in pastel colors. Made to look feminine. With long flowing auburn hair. And white skin. To look like, who looks so unreal. Like an alien from another planet.

That was a sanitized savior. A neutralized and downsized savior. A synthesized westernized savior. No, the Jesus of the Gospels is real.

[9 : 34] He gets his hands dirty. He finds he cuts himself in the carpenter's shop. If you shake Jesus' hand, he has those calluses on his hands. Like all carpenters do. And Jesus at the end of a hard day lay down on a straw mattress.

In a room with his other half brothers. Wondering where the next job was going to come from. He was a bloke. A real bloke. If he's nothing else, that's what he was like. And you can't ignore the history.

He appeared. But we do. We don't want the history. We admire the cultural values of Christianity.

Especially at Christmas. But we don't want to know about the history. We ignore the appearing. We admire the humility.

The culture, yes. The truth, no. Oh, we like selflessness. So we admire our soldiers, rightly so.

[10 : 38] For their selfless devotion. To what we ask them to do in places like Afghanistan. We despise the arrogant in politicians. And in the press.

And amongst journalists. So we have the Levison report. Rightly so. Where's the basis for all this? That we so admire.

Where's the basis for the moral stance that we have? The reason for the Christian morality. The foundation of that is here.

In our text. In the way Jesus entered history. And regarded others rather than himself. He didn't even think of himself.

He deliberately made himself nothing. And humbled himself. And became obedient unto death. Even death of the cross. He's the foundation of historic social humility. He's the selflessness that we admire.

[11 : 41] The humility we desire to see in others is there in Jesus Christ. But what we want to do. Is we want to separate the history. From the humility.

And the truth from the value. We just want the cozy religion of Christmas. Not the truth of Jesus' appearing. The mildness of Mary.

But not the muck of the stable. The Christmas of the snow. Not the bitter cold. Of a baby born in the night. The farmyard animals.

Not the filth of the inn. And the purity of the mother. Not the pain and the mess. Of a birth. But you know. We dare not separate history.

From value. In some instances. When we sent troops to Iraq. We had to have the history. Didn't we? We had to have it.

[12 : 38] There had to be the history of WMD in Iraq. For the troops to go. To justify the war. The history was supposed to back up the values of democracy. And the politics that we made.

And the action we took. That was the whole point of the Iraq inquiry. We didn't separate historical truth. From value then.

So why do we separate the values of selflessness and humility from the history of the virgin birth of Jesus now? Yes. Yes.

He appeared. In history. The feelings and values of Christmas and Easter need the history. And the doctrine. Of the virgin birth.

The humility and the selflessness. We honour and reward and admire a baseless. Without the truth. The history of the coming of Jesus Christ. The experience of real Christian values is inseparable.

[13 : 40] From the real historical Jesus who perfectly lived them out. And we need a continual reiteration of this history. His birth. His life. His death. His resurrection.

And return. To prevent the virtues we admire from fading away. And that's what's happening in some parts of our great cities. He appeared.

That's the first thing. The grace of God appeared in history. He really lived and walked on the planet. And put his feet where you can put your feet today.

But secondly. The grace of God brought salvation. Jesus Christ. The grace of God has appeared. Bringing salvation.

And what are we told? To watch your TV. What do we need? It's in the adverts.

[14 : 40] You know what we need? Cliff Richard. Mistletoe. And wine. That's what you need. Mince pies. Christmas cake.

Morecambe and Wise. The Queen's Speech. That's what you need. And don't forget lashings of Doctor Who. Are bound to feel better. It's coming you know.

23 days to Christmas. It says so downstairs. It must be right. The children got there first. They wrote it on the whiteboard. Downstairs. 23 days.

And more Doctor Who. It's coming. And you're going to feel good. And you're going to feel better. Not for long. Just for a few days.

Just for a few days. And then we're back at work. Aren't we? As grumpy as ever. There's no real lasting change.

[15 : 42] In us. At Christmas. That wonderful charity. Crisis at Christmas. Set up their city shelters. Don't they? For Christmas week. And a lot of homeless people.

Get a lot of support and help. Over Christmas. But it only lasts for so long. And then they're back on the street. For another year.

It's not permanent. It's not solving anything really. Cultural religion. And we see a manifestation of it at Christmas.

Leads to no lasting cultural change. Not that we should despise what crisis at Christmas do. It's a great work. I'm not doing that.

But we need something better. We need something greater. Something more energetic and powerful to turn around the mess. That we are all in.

[16 : 40] Cultural religion skates over the surface. Of the deep issues that you and I face. We don't just need to feel good.

We need to be made good. In our hearts. In a way that doesn't violate us. We need assurance of our future. And the boldness to face.

That final curtain. That for every one of us is coming. But we're too easily satisfied. With cultural religion second best. When Christ himself. Tells us.

He brought salvation. He changes us. He has all the power that religion lacks. He is able to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Just think. What if it were possible. For peace. Yes. Peace to spread through all the world today. And all conflicts cease. What if that were possible? What if it were possible.

- [17 : 36] For the manager who brightens up over Christmas in your workplace. To be nice like that all year round. What if I could be reassured.
- That the ones I love. Would be forever safe. From ultimate harm. What if I myself could be changed in my heart.
- And the selfishness I know lurks there. Could be replaced with love for other people. What if the fear I have. Of meeting my end.
- My last day on earth. Could be lifted. And what if the weakness I sense.
- In my own spirit. Could be traced to its root. In my sinful self. And the offense and guilt I know before God. Paid for.
- [18 : 36] My slate. White clean. Can. And it has been.
- Because Jesus brought salvation. For all men. He didn't just appear. As an example of humility. And selflessness. And live out a life of service for others.
- Healing the sick. Making the lame to walk. Opening the eyes of the blind. And enabling the dumb to speak. Oh he did all that. And he stood in solidarity with us. But scripture tells us he became.
- He became obedient unto death. It was there in the garden of Gethsemane. When he saw it all going to happen. Before his eyes. The agony that would.
- That would. Begin. As he went to the cross at Calvary. If it had been you. Or me. Or an angel.
- [19 : 35] We'd have sunk unto the weight. Of what Jesus was given to see. We wouldn't have prayed. Shedding blood from our foreheads. Like Jesus did. But unlike us. He became obedient.
- To death. Because the strength of his love. For you. And for me. Sustained him. His pain and sorrow. Because of our sin.
- Was great. But his love for you. Was greater. He didn't have to do that for us. You know. He had no ties to us. Having seen what his death entailed.
- In all its painful detail. He could have gotten up. And left the garden. In the darkness of that night. While his disciples were asleep. But he didn't. The Bible says he became obedient to death.
- Even the death of the cross. And as the cross came closer. His love for you got stronger. You see. You see. It's not just that we feel guilty sometimes.
- [20 : 33] For the things we fail to do. Or the offense we cause by our words and actions. Our attitudes. The fact is. We are really guilty.
- Whether we feel it or not. We're guilty before God. And we can't pay for that guilt ourselves. But Jesus has appeared.
- Bringing salvation. He's done what we could never do for ourselves. He was offered the cup of all our guilt there in the garden. And he looked into it. He saw the suffering.
- Such guilt brings on us from God's holy character. And what did he do? Because he loved us. He knew exactly what he had to do. It was either we perish.
- Or he endures this cup. What a choice. Did he give up on you? No. Was his love strong enough to keep him going on for you? Yes.
- [21 : 31] Did his love hold out for you? Yes. To the point of death. So that John could say. Greater love has no man than this. Than that a man lay down his life. For his friends.
- He took his. Jesus took our guilt upon himself. He laid his life down for us. His enemies. Died our death on the cross. You know. He didn't look at you and say.

Why should I be bothered with such a guilty lot? Why should I the glorious son of God. Holy and infinitely. More honourable and worthy than they are. Why should I concede to put myself through such agony?

No. He loved you. With an everlasting love. He willingly took all your guilt and suffering on himself. The punishment for every guilty and offensive thing you've ever done and said or thought.

Every wretched thing about us. And he paid it. With his life. You know. It's a bit like this.

[22 : 32] And this is a very poor illustration. Because I can't think of a better one. You know. It's Christmas. And you're in Cafe Nero. And you order a coffee. And you put your drink down on the counter.

And you turn around to speak to your friend. And you knock it over. And there's the customer behind you. Drenched in your coffee. And he's just bought this fleece that he's wearing.

And it's completely soaked. In this wonderful coffee from Cafe Nero. And he's looking down at himself. Dripping. And you're thinking. What have I done?

Who's going to pay? Well someone has to do it. It's either you. Because you've knocked the coffee over. And you say.

I'll pay to have it dry clean professionally. You know. I'm to blame. It's my fault. But the guy.

[23 : 29] The guy who's wearing the fleece. That's now drenched in your coffee. He says. No. I'll forgive you. I'll stand the cost.

Of cleaning it up myself. You've stained. The character of God. That's what sin is. It is a stain on the character of God.

And someone's got to pay. For the stains and the blemishes on him. And either you pay. Or the other chap takes it upon himself to pay.

Forgiveness costs you know. One way or the other. And if you decide to pay. For the offence that you've caused God. You will. And you'll pay forever.

In an eternity of hell. And God will give you all the time in the world. And it will be utter agony for you. Because you know what? You'll never ever pay. No matter how hard you try.

[24 : 33] And how long you're paying for. Or you could take Jesus' salvation. You could accept him. And what he's done for you. What he brought to you.

Because he's paid that price. You owed in full. For all your sin on the cross. He's paid it.

And you can say. I don't deserve that. But thank you Jesus. For dying for me there. That's the salvation Jesus brought for all of us.

Paid in full. Paid on the nail. Paid for you. The grace of God brought salvation. It appeared. Brought salvation.

For all of us. For all men. Three things. First of all. The bigness of God's heart. The Christian church is found.

[25 : 31] You know. Across the world. Isn't it? In every country. Even the most. Inhospitable and reactionary countries. The most antagonistic. And resistant to the gospel of Christ. There you will always find. True believers in Jesus Christ.

In those communist days. When Albania. Proclaimed it had no church. There were believers. In Tirana. The capital of Albania.

No other world religion. If I can put it like that. Is universal. Every nation of men. God is no respecter of persons. Says Paul. And it's true in God's judgment. All will have to stand before the judgment seat of God.

No one escapes. But also. No one is excluded. From the grace of God. It's for all of us. All nations. All classes. All occupations.

All cultures. All sexualities. All genders. All backgrounds. All colours. All races. All incomes. All intellectual abilities. All disabilities. It is truly inclusive. It is the grace of God. No one can leave the Bible.

[26 : 28] And not be amazed. That God is the God for all. Well the church hasn't. Quite really reflected. The openness of the heart of God. The real wideness.

Of the mercy of God. God. But that's what God is like. In the Bible. For all men. The grace of God. That brings salvation.

Has appeared. To all men. God doesn't pick and choose. God doesn't pick and choose. Who he saves. According to our particular criteria. Or our particular prayers.

You know. We have our own agendas. But he has his. And he brings home. Who he seeks. From the far country. And brings him to the father's house. It takes time.

For some of our brothers in Christ. To realise that. And however small. We try to make God. God really is bigger. Than our hearts. The early church learned that.

[27 : 29] Didn't they? Their hearts weren't big enough. To embrace an apostle Paul. They couldn't believe. He'd been converted. You go back to Acts chapter 9.

And you find there. The disbelief. And incredulity. Of the early church. That here was Paul. This man. Who'd been persecuting. Christians. And murdering them. And breathing out murdering threats.

Converted. Brought to Christ. The bigness. Of God's heart. All men. And the power of God's love.

You know. There's nothing in a person. That God by his grace. Isn't able to overcome. He can bring that man. That woman. That boy. Or that girl. To himself. You may be looking down your street. And thinking.

What a set of people. They are. That live in that house. Jesus can save them. Yes he can. Don't you downgrade. The grace.

[28 : 27] And the love. And the power of God. You may see people. Walking past this church. On Skinner Street. And think. He'll never be converted. Don't you believe it. Don't you believe it.

I said. God can turn around. And Apostle Paul. Yes he can. He can turn around. And Martin Luther. And he was a bit of a fiery character. I would not have met him on a dark night.

And there's one or two others. In the history of the church. That you wouldn't really want to meet. On a dark night either. We were talking. Over lunch. And after lunch. About one or two of the characters. In Calvin's Geneva. And we wouldn't have liked to have met them.

Wouldn't Alan and I. On a dark night either. There were some real characters. Down there. In the early reformation period. But God saved them. Because of the bigness. And the power of his love.

That drew them to Christ. You can't say you're too bad for God. You can't say you've done something. That God could never forgive. You can't say you're too far gone in sin.

[29 : 27] For God to save me. You can't say. I'm past redemption. The love of God. And the power of God. And the power of God. Won't allow that.

You know. It's a challenge we face. In 2013. To believe God. To save people. We've perhaps given up on. In our prayers. And thoughts. And hopes. And aspirations.

All men. Think of the implications. All men. Don't you give up on anyone. Because I tell you.

God never gave up on you. Did he? God never gave up on you. God never gave up on you. God never gave up on you. God never gave up on you. And look how much power and love it took to save you. From sin. And the wonder of grace.

Here's the wonder of the grace of God. You see. Why did Paul write to Titus and say. The grace of God. Has appeared to all men. Bringing salvation to all men.

[30 : 30] When he could have said Jesus Christ. Couldn't he? Actually that's what I've assumed in this sermon. That the grace of God means. Jesus.

So why say the grace of God? Because the culture of Crete. Where Titus ministered. Was judgmental. Like the culture of Rome.

And that of Greece. Crete was the same. It was an honor culture. Where every man was for himself. Everyone looked down on everybody else.

Pride was honored. Humility was frowned upon. The weak were excluded. And trodden underfoot. Sometimes literally. Only the strong survived. Harsh and unforgiving times.

Human reason and intellectual arrogance. And smart rhetoric. Was admired. There was always someone ready to judge you. Ready to condemn you. It was that kind of culture.

[31 : 33] And what happens? What does God do? In a place like Crete. He does this. He does the gracious thing. And turns around a culture.

That's honor bound. And turns it into a gracious culture. He chooses the weak things of this world. To shame the supposedly strong. He chooses the lowly things of this world.

And the despised things. Things that are not. That have no consequence. To those who think they matter. To nullify the things that are. He chooses the foolish things of the world.

To shame the so-called wise. God confounds the proud in their conceit. With his grace. The grace of God. Is a wonderful thing.

Because it turns out. Completely around. The expectations. And the thoughts of men. God is saying to Titus. You're a key part. Titus. Of the building I'm creating.

[32 : 31] In Crete. A community of grace. An alternative community. To the culture in which you live and work. A community where I value. Christlike humility.

Above all other things. And where I prohibit judgmentalism. As Jesus said. Judge not that you be not judged. An alternative lifestyle. Is what you're living Titus. An alternative culture.

Is what you're creating. By the grace of God. God. And it's this grace. Said Thomas Goodwin. The old Puritan. That makes us gracious. Exactly.

That's the grace. That's the grace that Jesus is. Seeking to build into his community. Here in every. Evangelical gospel church.

It's the grace. It's the grace we receive when we find him. When he finds us. And it's the grace that we give away in the world. When we witness to a world about him.

[33 : 28] It's the grace that makes us the fifth column of transforming grace in the world. It's the grace that makes us a city as a people of God. Of transforming grace within the wider community.

Like a Trojan horse of grace. Continually surprising the inhabitants of the town and the city. With our deeds of grace and kindness and unexpected love. Bringing Christ Jesus to where he's never been before.

And in so doing giving God the opportunity to transform this city. This town. This community. The grace of God. The wonder of the grace of God.

It's appeared. Historically. Bringing salvation. For all men. And our challenge.

And our opportunity. And our privilege is to take that grace with us. As we leave this room. And to bring it to the community that's around us. We're not meant to hold it in.

[34 : 29] And to cherish it like some precious fruit. We're meant to spread it. Give it away. For that's what Jesus did when he came. He gave himself for us.

And if he's going to be incarnating us. Then we are going to give ourselves away. For the world that we live among. God help us to do that.

For his name's sake. Let's pray. Father we thank you for this amazing text. Help us to see the implications of what Jesus did for us.

Of his grace in our lives. That we might be willing and urgent and determined. To demonstrate his grace in our own lives.

And to reveal him to others. That we meet in our community. In our workplace. In our neighborhood. In our schools. Our colleges. Our hospitals. And wherever we work. And wherever we're found.

[35 : 30] Help us in this week we pray. To do that for his name's sake. Amen.