

Godly Leaders

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: 07 January 2024

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 0 0] Okay, well good morning everyone. Happy New Year to you. It is so lovely to welcome so many of you back after holidays. Hope you had a great time. Wonderful to see you again and lovely to meet some new faces this morning as well. Know that you are so welcome with us here and genuinely know if there's anything that we can do to serve you as a local church, it would be our delight to be able to do that. Let me invite you to come expectantly to the book in the Bible called Titus. You might want to grab a Bible, your own Bible that you came with or one in the pew or maybe you want to scroll on your phone, a little inside tip for finding Titus. It's in the New Testament, one of the letters towards the end. It's in among these clusters of T's. So you get 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. So it's the last of the T's. So if you find yourself in one of those T's, you know roughly where to go. As you're turning there, let me give you a big invite to our prayer and pizza evening tonight at 6.30. We're going to do a big prayer push this year as a church just to embed and try and gather everyone into the prayer life of the church.

More details on that will come in the next couple of weeks. But for tonight, we're going to stick with a time of half past six for some pizza, eat together, and then we're going to move straight into a time of prayer, finishing up roughly half seven, maybe just after half past seven.

If you got one of the prayer cards on the way in tonight, this is supposed to be the focus for the month, the things that we're praying for as a church, as well as the usual church activities. We want to be a church that just blesses others and gives away prayer. So we are praying tonight for Charlotte Chapel, just giving away prayer, praying for another church in our city. They've told us how we can pray for them. And we're also going to be praying for, as Ian alluded to, UCCF and their events week, which is happening this week. So particularly if you're a student here tonight, whether you're at Edinburgh or elsewhere, or maybe particularly you love the work of UCCF, it was a huge part in my growth as a Christian. Or if you're just a student, we would love to pray particularly for you tonight. So please do come along if you are in those categories. It would just be lovely to be able to do that with you. So that's 6.30 tonight. Do grab one of those cards on the way out. Now I've waggled on the tea long enough that you should have found Titus, hopefully.

But this is what we do as a church at the beginning of every single new year. We do it to shake off the Christmas new year grogginess, and we do it to get the caffeine into our spiritual systems, as it were.

We do a short sermon series from a book in the Bible that reminds us who we are, what we believe as a local church, and why we exist. Have I left the clicker down there? I know it's in my back pocket. There we go. So this is Titus chapter 1. So come with me, we'll read it together, and then we will hear God's voice as we unpack it a little bit together. So Paul writes this. This is chapter 1 we're going to take in this morning. Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and which now at his appointed season, he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour. To Titus, my true son in our common faith, grace and peace from

[3 : 53] God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour. The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. For there are many rebellious people full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group.

They must be silenced because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach, and that for the sake of dishonest gain. One of Crete's own prophets has said it.

Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. This saying is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions, they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good. And God will add the blessing to his inspired word this morning. As we get into Titus, let me let you into a conversation that we had with one of our children when they came back from school a few months ago. And it was the day after one of those Monday school strikes. If you remember, we had lots of them a few months ago. And we asked her, what did your friends do yesterday? And she said that one of them had a yes day.

Now, I don't know if you're familiar with this modern day fad. It's taken from this Netflix film that came out in 2021. If you've got a couple of hours, there's better things to do with your time, but you can watch it if you go home. But see the strapline of this film. For a whole 24 hours, kids make the rules. And the whole thing of the film is that for 24 hours, mum and dad have to say yes to everything that their children suggest. And the whole idea behind this film is that life's really dull and boring when you just say no. And actually, real fun is to be found when you say yes to whatever you desire and whatever you want in the moment. Now, we've actually watched this film.

And I have to say, if ever you're looking for a film that captures the spirit of our age, then you would do a lot worse than capturing the message of that one. See, our ruggedly individualistic culture, it prizes self-expression. Now, the bigwigs, the people who get paid tons of money at Netflix aren't stupid, they know that impulse living is attractive in our world.

[7 : 54] And because this is the air that you and I breathe every day as we live our lives in this world, I imagine that like osmosis, some of it has made its way into our systems probably way more than we realise. Are you like me in that every so often you pause and you think to yourself, am I missing out? As a believer in Jesus, am I missing the whole reason that I'm kind of designed to find joy and happiness in this world?

Do you know, this letter of Titus has wonderfully reminded me of both the privilege and the joy of being able to say no to the way that our culture and our world thinks and lives. Now, why on earth would you do that? The answer is that the disciple of Jesus has had their eyes opened to something way better. Now, here is Paul, verse 1, come with me to the text. He's writing to his son in the faith called Titus, which I always think is a wonderful name, at verse 4. Titus is this guy who we meet in a few other places in the New Testament. He's playing his part in the unity and the growth of the early church as well as one of Paul's travelling companions. And the two of them likely preach about Jesus and plant this church on the island of Crete. Now, I tried to put the map up there rather than images of the island, lest you get distracted by the thoughts of summer holidays.

Yeah, there they are on Crete. Now, if you look at verse 12, you'll get a little glimpse into Cretan culture. What are the people in Crete like? They say the Scots are tight. They say the Irish are cheeky. They say Londoners are rude because they never speak to you on the tube, right? What about Cretans? Well, see Paul quotes from one of Crete's greatest thinkers, this man called Epimenides.

Do you see it in verse 12? He says this about his fellow Cretans. He says, Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. Now, that's a slogan I don't imagine the Visit Crete Tourist Board are going to use anytime soon. Crete in this day is an island famous for having no wild animals, which means that David Attenborough and his team aren't going to pitch up on Crete and shoot a nature documentary. But the joke that they make about Cretans is that the fact that they have no wild animals is more than made up for the fact that they have tons of wild people.

Wildlife. And this is where Paul pitches up with the gospel. And you think to yourself, surely when it comes to people that are going to maybe make lightly converts, surely there's what we would call lower hanging fruit.

[11 : 06] Surely there's easier places to go to make inroads with the gospel in this day. But here's the thing that Paul is convinced of, that the only thing that has the power to create a spiritual and moral revolution on the island of Crete is the gospel.

It's the only thing that's going to transform the lives of the people on this island. This message about the crucified and risen Jesus. And because that's true, I think this letter invites us to pray big gospel prayers and have big gospel ambitions this year.

Here's the question I've been asking myself all week. Am I convinced and are you convinced as we look out on our city and all the people and all the businesses and all the dreams and all the influence that there is here, that if there is to be leaders who do the right thing, truth winning over untruth, people putting other people first, different generations not just speaking past each other, but coming together as one, if there's to be that kind of revolution in our city, then the only thing that's going to do it, the only thing that can deliver the goods is the gospel.

The only thing that's going to transform our society is this message about Jesus Christ. And dear friends, know that the church are right at the centre of it.

Now, here's what I want you to see.

[13 : 00] I want you to see what the church are called at verse 1. Do you see it? Don't miss the term. It's so easy to skip over the introduction to letters like this.

But actually, this is one of the most detailed and long introductions we get in Paul's letters. He wants Titus to know things. He wants him to know things about the church. What are they called?

They are called God's elect. Now, let that phrase both stretch you and thrill you this morning. Because that means if you are a Christian here today, that that is no small thing.

How often we just write it off as if it is. If it's just another lifestyle choice amongst the thousands of others that we could pick in this world. No, no, no, no. Paul says, if you're here today, you love and follow this Jesus.

That is an incredible thing. As ordinary as you think your life looks. Know that it's anything but ordinary as far as heaven is concerned.

[14 : 03] It means if you're a Christian here today, this word, it's all caught up in this word. That God the Father in eternity past, it was his pleasure to choose you and give you to God the Son.

And at a moment in time, which we've just celebrated at Christmas, God the Son, he came. He took on our flesh. And at that point, he took a name called Jesus. Jesus, the man who lived the perfect life, the one that we couldn't live.

The Bible's word for that is his righteousness. Jesus, the man who died the death that you and I should have died on the cross. The Bible's idea for that is substitution.

And on the third day, Jesus rises from the dead. He later ascends to heaven. And from heaven, the Spirit was sent. And he came and he applied that work of Jesus to our lives as we heard and as we responded to the gospel.

Just think about that for a minute. That every time eternal life surfaces in Edinburgh, sorry, eternal life surfaces in Edinburgh every time that we talk about Jesus.

[15 : 17] And the Spirit, he dwells in our hearts so that we can share and know the love that the Father has for his Son. And we can live for that purpose.

Do you see? To be a Christian is no small thing. And verse 1, Titus is to work to help the disciples on Crete.

Do you see? What's he to do? Help them grow in their knowledge of the truth that will in turn lead to godliness. Do you see that word?

Godliness. And don't confuse that word with goodliness. This is not about our determination to turn over a new leaf.

This is not about us cleaning up our act on the outside. You know, there's a woman in the States called Jen Wilkin. She's just a brilliant thinker. Just love reading her work.

[16 : 18] She puts this so much better than I can. I thought about paraphrasing it and I thought, no, we'll just give her the quote. Here's what she says. If we focus on our actions without addressing our hearts, we may end up merely as better behaved lovers of self.

No, godliness is different from goodliness. Godliness is how the grace of Jesus transforms us on the inside and produces Jesus-like fruit for his glory and by his grace on the outside.

What's going to work on Crete? What's going to convince people of the truth of the claims of Jesus is when the ordinary people of this island see in Christians the effect of a transformed life.

Now, I hope that encourages you here today. We're going to see this as we travel through this letter because you might think, my Christian life is anything but extraordinary.

You think what you're doing in your life is anything but extraordinary. You think nobody notices me. Friends, this tells you that God has got purposes for your life.

[17 : 36] Good works is a huge theme in this letter. Don't underestimate the power and the witness of a transformed life wherever you are, whatever you're doing.

You see, if Cretans are liars, in other words, if truth is negotiable, if truth is moldable, if Cretans are knowing as being evil, and I take it that just means people are encouraged to let their passions run wild, and if Cretans are knowing as being lazy, which may well be a reference to their work ethic, do you know what?

It might just also be a fact that people just live for today and they never think about tomorrow. How striking then, throughout this letter, that Paul says Jesus' people will be marked by things that are completely the opposite of that.

They will be marked by a love for sound truth, and sound is just the opposite of diseased. A love for sound truth, a desire for self-control, and a zeal for good works.

Now, how different, strikingly different, is a community like that going to look on an island like Crete?

[18 : 54] How different is a church like that going to look in a city like ours? It was the late John Stott who said, it's only dead fish you go with the flow.

And see, crucial to all of this is the leaders of this church. The Bible's word for leaders of the church is elders. That's why you get that word elders here.

The men who are tasked with being the Christ-like servant leaders of the church family. See, Paul's concern in this letter is the passing of the leadership baton from him to Titus.

And also he's concerned for the generation of elders who will come both alongside Titus and come after Titus. That's what Titus is to put into order at verse 5.

And as you might expect, leadership in the church is radically different from leadership in the world. Do you want a little fun fact about Crete? Didn't know it until this week, so it was really cool.

[20 : 05] Do you know why Cretans are known as liars? It's not a joke. It sounds like a joke, doesn't it? It's not. It's because they claim to be the place where Zeus was born.

Right? Apparently that's where Zeus is born, on Crete. People love that fact on Crete. People outside Crete look in and say, no chance. Really hot potato topic in this day.

Zeus, the chief Greek deity, considered to be the ruler, the protector, and the father of all gods and humans. Now, regardless of whether or not that fact is a fact, if that's fake news in our terms, think about what that potentially means for how leadership and how power are viewed in Crete.

If you are breathing the air every day of the guy who is famously depicted as carrying a thunderbolt in his hand, surely on some level, that's got to subconsciously work its way through your system and into the mindset as you consider the power and influence that you have, even as small as it may be.

Why does Paul have to mention that Christian elders are not to be arrogant and quick-tempered and violent? Could it well be that that is just what you default to doing with power and the influence that you have in Crete?

[21 : 33] You know, my brother who works in finance, his phone went off the other day. Someone had liked his post on LinkedIn.

Now, some of you will be on that. I don't even know whether it's a social media site or not. Some of you will have no idea what I'm talking about. It's a place where you, online, you just upload your CV and credentials so that the wider world can see.

And I asked him, I said, do you like using LinkedIn? LinkedIn? And he said, well, kind of in my field, you have to. And this was his line. He said, it's the app of shameless self-promotion.

See, in our world, friends, you and I are used to composing and putting together CVs that say to a prospective employer, this is how high and how willing I am to jump. Whereas the CV of a Christian leader says, not this is how high I can jump.

A CV of a Christian leader says, this is how low I'm willing to stoop. Christian leadership is not about following the man with a thunderbolt in his hand.

[22 : 41] Christian leadership is about seeking to emulate the man who has a cross on his back. And when Paul talks about elders here, do you notice how he doesn't primarily talk about structures?

You know, as important as they are, I take it is pretty context specific when you think about structures in a church. Nor does he talk about competency. He talks here primarily about, and you see it, he talks about character.

And what you get here is just a contrast between good leaders and bad leaders. The type of which there are clearly many who are prowling around the church scene in Crete and who are peddling a distorted and a false gospel, who are seeking to deny the sufficiency of Jesus and his death and the transforming effect of grace, who are saying, you kind of need to clean up your outside act and do stuff.

Whereas that is not what the gospel of grace says. And you might be saying to yourself, why should I care about elders? Let me just say, we should all care about this because the stakes are really, really high.

You go wrong here, you appoint the wrong kind of elders, you let the wrong kind of people have influence, and there are disastrous consequences for the health and the well-being of the church, not to mention, I think, particularly in Crete, the reputation of the gospel.

[24 : 13] And I had someone tell me the other day how they refuse to buy brew dog beer anymore. And the reason is that they simply detest how the owner has abused his power and has treated his employees now that that whole thing has been made public.

You understand, don't you, if you're in leadership and it goes wrong there, the disastrous effect for the renown of Jesus as it can have on a city.

Eldership really matters. Let me just say there are five of us men who do this here at Brunfield who serve in this role. There we are on the screen. The reason that Pete and JT's names are in white there, just to clarify, is simply just the color contrast.

They're not special. Special, okay? But consider this permission to keep us accountable that we are serving you by doing this and by being this.

We should all care about leadership in the church. Just really quickly, there are two things that are telltale signs that someone is elder material. Remember, Paul is saying to Titus, you need to appoint men like this to lead the church.

[25 : 30] They're going to give themselves for the good of the people. Let me just say, before we get into this, it's our joy to serve you as elders here. It really is. It really is. I get to do this full-time.

These guys do it. A mixture of part-time. These guys do it on top of full-time jobs, looking after children, all the rest of it. Can I just say, don't say this to me, but go out of your way to thank these men.

I see, I see how hard they work for you. How they labor, how they toil, how they visit, how they write emails, how they plan. They do this on top of everything else that they do, and they do it because they love Jesus and they love you.

Here's the first one we were talking about elder material. It's the fruit of his life. See, the world makes a distinction between someone's public and private life, and I guess that their private life is considered less important than simply their ability to do the job.

When it comes to eldership, it is completely the opposite. It's completely the opposite. And maybe you're here today and you're not a Christian. We love that you're here.

[26 : 40] Maybe can I just ask you, do you see the examples and the effects of bad leadership as you look at our world? I want you to know, and God wants you to know, that in his church this should be exactly the same.

Maybe you're here today and you've been burnt by the church over the years by bad leadership. How do you say that? I'm so, so sorry that that has been the case. Know how God feels about that when we see the standards that he wants in his leaders.

You know, a good indicator that someone is going to be good at loving and leading the spiritual family of God. Paul says, look at how he loves and leads his biological family.

And I take it that doesn't mean that just only elders are the ones who are married and have a family. I don't think that's the application here. But I think Paul's saying if you want a good guess at how he's going to be at leading the spiritual family of God, look at his own life.

If he has one, does he have children? Do his children, and I take it the word there is talking about young children still at home, how are they with him? Does he take the time?

[27 : 46] Can you see it to nurture his children? Does he enjoy them? Does he see them as a blessing in his life? Is he bringing them up to know Jesus?

And talking to families, what does his wife say about him? The person who sees him when no one else is watching, the person who sees him when his guard is down, how does he relate to her?

Is it clear to everyone watching that he has eyes for her alone? Does he seek to show hospitality? I take it that's more than just does he throw a decent dinner party?

This is more akin to does he welcome and does he love strangers? Is his home a place, a safe place of refuge for people? And why does that matter?

It matters because does his heart reflect the God of radical hospitality? You know, they always say that you should dance like no one's watching.

[28 : 53] Well, an elder friend is to be this when no one's watching. He's not putting it on. This is not his game face. He comes and this is just who he is.

Consider the fruit of his life and equally consider the truth from his lips. Do you see verse 9? Does he hold firmly to that trustworthy message as has been taught?

Does he know the gospel? Does he love the gospel? Does he hold the gospel? Again, because it's the truth that's going to lead to godliness. It's the truth that's going to lead to the flourishing of this church.

It's not about how well we're able to do events. It's not about how structured we are. What is going to transform this church and continue to do it for God's glory is the truth. It's the truth.

Now, in our world where in 2016 the word post-truth was declared to be the word of the year by the Oxford Dictionary. And there's a lovely little irony there, isn't there, in the truth that that word is actually two words, but we'll let that go.

[29 : 55] Into our post-truth world, see when the going gets tough, an elder who's worth his soul is not going to shapeshift with the changing seasons of culture.

No, an elder will hold steadfastly to the truth of the gospel, be willing to take the hit for it because he loves it and he's convinced of it and he loves Jesus.

He loves Jesus' people. And that means as elders, as we lead through our teaching, notwithstanding the place of creativity up here, what you will find up here is nothing but an unashamed commitment to unoriginality.

Now, this is Tim Chester. He's written a great commentary on this called Titus. He says it like this. He says, peddling orthodoxy is not a great way to make a name for yourself. Sell books or draw a crowd because by very definition, it's all been said before.

And let me just say, we are committed as leaders to being teachers who just say what's been said before. For generations before us, for millennia before us, that's the truth of Jesus Christ.

[31 : 18] Why? Because God's word is eternal. And that's what we need. The truth will lead to godliness. See maybe the offensive angle in this at verse 9.

Why does he do this? An elder, so that he can encourage others with it. Do you know in our world where it's all too easy just to position yourself in a social media echo chamber and you just surround yourself with opinions that you just agree with?

A loving elder will know that what is nicest for you to hear is not always the best thing for you to hear. He will put your eternal destiny before your present comfort.

He will have that word because he loves you. Let me just ask you to just broaden it out a little bit. Friends, do you have people in your lives who will tell you the hard things that you don't want to hear?

And you know that they will do that because they love you. Not that they're nitpicking or they're out to get you. You know that they love you. Do you have people like that in your life? I take it that's why we need each other, that we can speak the truth in love to each other.

[32 : 31] See the defensive angle on it as well. He will refute those who oppose it. Clearly knows, Paul knows the situation in Crete where these false teachers are on the prowl. Verse 10, he calls them rebellious people full of meaningless talk and deception.

I take it he's really strong on this because he loves Titus and he loves what God is doing through this church in Crete. Paul exposes their motives. Verse 11, do you see, for dishonest gain.

Clearly, whatever they were saying was enough to unsettle these Christians. People, Paul says, verse 16, are people who profess to know God but who deny him by their works.

You know, we went for a walk on New Year's Day across the moors where my parents live, just outside Glasgow. We realized we'd brought outside boots for two of the children and not one of the children.

So Grace is on this walk. She's wearing her trainers and she's jumping in and out of muddy puddles. And it doesn't take us long, or sorry, it didn't take long before those trainers were absolutely soaking wet.

[33 : 41] And we utter the classic line that you always utter as parents. For goodness sake, you're soaked right through. And I take it Paul is saying here that an elder is a man who is soaked right through with the gospel.

You ring him when the pressure gets tough, that's what's going to come out of him. And he is the flip of verse 16. He will be somebody who claims to know God and he shows it by his works.

Now listen, our time's gone, but let me just finish with this thought. You know, we started thinking about a little girl who had a yes day. Just as we close, let me tell you a story I heard recently about a man who had a no day.

He was a Church of Scotland minister from years ago who ministered up in this tiny village in the north of Scotland called May. Right?

You'll never have heard of May. I had to Google it where it was this week, but it is famous for one thing and one thing only. It's got a castle. Royal family, occasionally I think have gone there over the years.

[34 : 53] And the story goes about this minister in this church, this elder, that the Queen happened to be up in that neck of the woods one time on her Scottish trip. And the minister was called by the Queen's aide and the Queen's aide really simply said, would you join the Queen and I for dinner?

And this minister, he turned it down because that evening happened to be the church prayer meeting and he made a commitment to eight of his fellow parishioners, the story goes, to be with them and to pray with them.

So slightly kicking himself that he missed the opportunity, a while later, the phone goes and it's the QM, the Queen Mother's aide again and he said, the Queen got your message and she wants you to know that you made a really wise choice and actually you can come round for dinner tomorrow night if you want.

And listen, a good elder, just as we finish, will be a man who is not dazzled by the glitz and the glamour, a man who's not swayed by public opinion, a man who's not swayed by celebrity status, a man who's not seeking platform and likes, a man who's committed to God's truth and he's committed to the people that God has called him to love and to serve.

So that is why Paul says, that's why I left you in Crete. Let me just let you into the verse that we're going to think about next week and I think this is the heart of the letter but let's just finish with this and you'll see the themes that we picked up on a lot of today.

[36 : 33] Chapter 2, verse 11, Paul writes this, for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Father, we thank you so much for this morning and we thank you for your word. And Lord, I just pray that as a church this year, we would be marked by a radical dependence on you.

Father, as we want our church to be, as the Lord Jesus said, a light that's shining on a hill, Father, that others would look in here and that they would see the grace of Jesus that truly transforms.

So Father, I pray, maybe pray for myself and for the other elders here today, Lord, that you would help us to lead like Jesus. Lord, would a love for him spill out into a love for the people of this church and a renown for your name across this city.

Father, help us to be a people who live self-controlled lives, upright in every way as we wait for the returning glorious Jesus.

[38 : 04] In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.