

Titus 1:1-4

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you so much, Peter, and to the guys in the band for leading us thus far. Are we well? Yes, good. Well, can I encourage you to turn to the little book of Titus?

A little trick for you if you're struggling to find it, this New Testament letter is the last of the five consecutive T's in the New Testament. One Tim, two Tim, one Thess, two Thess, one Tim, two Tim, and then our little friend Titus at the end there.

That's for free. It's not even in my notes. But there you go. That's how I remember these little things. And Titus is where we'll be for the next little while. This little book that I hope at the end of our few weeks in this letter will become not only just a friend and an acquaintance, but actually will become a good companion as we continue to travel on as a church community.

So would you turn to Titus and let's pray and let's ask that God would be so gracious to us this evening as we come to his word. Let's pray together. Oh, dear Father, we're so aware, Lord, as we come here this evening that our view of you, our grasp of you is so small.

Our view of your son is so small. Our view of your spirit is so small. And so, dear Father, it's simply our prayer as we come to your word this evening, as we gather as your people together, that you would, by your spirit, as your word is preached this evening, would you make yourself big in our sight?

[1 : 30] So, Father, would we leave this place this evening just with a greater understanding, appreciation and affection for who you are? And so that is our prayer, Lord, that you be so gracious and kind to us.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I thought we'd begin just by a little bit of fun. I'm always up for fun. I thought we'd begin by a bit of fun. Let's see how many different countries are represented here tonight.

There is a point to this. You'll see. Just shout them out. How many different countries have we got represented here tonight? Italy? Britain? Scotland?

Okay. Anyone else? Northern Ireland? Germany? Here's a question for you. Simona and Luca.

How do people perceive Italians? What do they say about Italians?

Pizza. Okay. Germans? Okay. I would think of hardworking. I would think of. What do you think?

Put your hands up if you're Scottish. How do you think people perceive us?

[2 : 36] Okay. Hold that thought. It was a rhetorical question. Should have made it clearer. Hold that thought. How do you think people perceive Scottish people? I was reading an article this week by a team at Cambridge University who did some research about the different reputations that people, different people groups in Britain have.

Okay. So I'm doing a bit of research into this. This is what the research said. Cambridge University. Our survey found that Londoners were regarded as being uncooperative, quarrelsome and irritable. People in the east of England were found to be the most conscientious but were more likely to be set in their ways. The Welsh tend to be more open. But our survey found that they were the shyest and they were the least emotionally stable.

The Scots have long enjoyed a reputation for being grumpy, aloof and doer. There's a good Scottish word for you, doer. But our new study suggests that they are actually the most friendly people in Britain.

Can I get an amen? Amen. This is what people, I don't know if that's true or not, but this is apparently how we're perceived by the outside world. There's Scottish people on the Royal Mile.

[3 : 50] Look at them. Beautiful. Beautiful. Here's what I want you to do this evening. I want us to do this evening. I want to take us from thinking about the people of our island and how they are perceived.

And I want us to travel back to the first century and introduce you to a people from another island. So we're going back this evening to the island of Crete.

This letter of Titus written by Paul to Titus, to a man and to a church who are living on this island of Crete. This large island just off the coast of Greece. And let me introduce you to some of the locals on this island.

Name for the locals? Cretans. Reputation of the locals? Well, these people are infamous for their lack of ethics, for their lying, and for their absolute greed.

In fact, one of the Greek words for being a liar, the word kretizo, literally to be a cretin. Now, just to give you a flavour of the distaste for this people, let me read to you, this is what I found in my research this week, a few of the sayings about these people that outsiders looking in had about them.

[5 : 03] This is Plutarch, the Greek biographer. He always joked about the fact that on Crete, there were no wild animals with four legs, but that was more than made up for the fact that there were tons of wild animals with two legs living on the island.

Pauli Bias, the Greek historian, made the following comments about the Cretans. He said, So we have that today in our culture, don't we?

We hate money cheats. We hate money cheats. We think about in the world of sports, when somebody signs for another team because they got offered more money. We hate them, don't we? But in this culture, Cretans, that kind of behaviour is lauded.

It's praised. Everybody wants to reach the top, accumulate more stuff. This is the people who are on this island. And here's the wonderful news for us to comprehend this evening from this letter, is that the gospel has reached Crete.

And it hasn't just reached Crete, it has taken root in Crete. And God, through his gospel, has birthed a church on this island.

[6 : 37] Now, if we were ranking people in terms of who was likely and least likely to become Christians, where the gospel was going to have impact and not have impact, this island would be very low on our rankings.

Now, isn't that not a wonderful lesson for us straight off the bat? As we think about our nation, as we think about our city, as we think even just about our area, what do we so often think?

That this is hard soil. But is this not encouraging? This is what encouraged me this week. That this tells us that the gospel is unstoppable. That the gospel is powerful.

And it can break the hardest of soils. And it can melt even the hardest of hearts. And God's word, as it goes forth, it will accomplish the purposes that he intends for it.

That is encouraging. Now, let me just tell you that the two main parties to this letter, Paul and Titus, the apostle and his co-worker, traveling companion and protégé.

[7 : 47] Now, whenever it is exactly that they were on Crete, whether it was during the events recorded in the book of Acts, whether it was after those events, whatever conclusion you come to, the gospel has taken root on Crete.

And through this message being preached, God has saved men and women to himself. He has lifted them out of the darkness and he's put them into his glorious kingdom of light.

And he's created this community of Christians on this island of Crete. Now, you can imagine that these Christians are gathering in each other's homes to worship and to fellowship with one another and to encourage one another.

These are most likely house church gatherings that are on this island. And I think we can probably assume from the letter that this is a young church.

It's a really young church. In fact, some commentators would place this church as not even being a year old. These are new Christians. This is an inexperienced church.

[8 : 51] This is a church who are trying to find their feet. Just picture what that is like. I remember a little girl when she was learning to walk last year.

It was an absolute joy to watch her do it, but it was messy. She would go for it and she would kind of stumble and she would bang her head and she's trying to work out limbs. Do you know, she's just trying to work this thing out.

It's kind of like that when we first become Christians. Isn't it? We're trying to figure this thing out. How the gospel has flipped our lives upside down. Trying to work out, I mean, what is it about our old lives that Jesus calls us to leave behind in pursuit of him?

My old lifestyles. My old habits. My old ambitions. What is it that he calls me to say no to in order to follow him?

We're trying to work out the contours of the Christian life. That I see the world differently now. I see it through the God lens. I'm trying to discern what is false and what is true in this life.

[9 : 58] Trying to grapple with what it means to live as part of this new family of God, the church that God has grafted me into. All of a sudden, before, I've got nothing in common with these people.

Now, all of a sudden, I've got the most important thing in my life in common with these people. Just trying to figure it out. So the challenge is that these new Christians are probably facing on this island.

So we can begin to appreciate, can't we, the pressures that this church are facing. Pressures that they're facing. I think two main sources of pressures. Firstly, internal pressures.

Now, imagine it. Just picture it. You're in that home group setting. And you look at one another across the room. You think, well, what do we do now? What do we do now?

What do we stand for? How do we behave as a community? How do we work together? How do we help one another? And into the mix, I think you've got false teachers in this letter.

[11 : 03] We learn a lot about them who are trying to infiltrate this church. Who are trying to spin lies. Who are trying to cause these Christians to deviate their course from following the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I think particularly in this letter, if you've got it there, chapter 1 and verse 10. There's a Jewish flavor to this false teaching. What are they telling you?

Well, I know Paul said this. I know he said that. But you know, crazy Uncle Paul, it's a bit more like this. Did he tell you not to do that?

No, you kind of need to do that. He said you can do that. No, you definitely can't do that. So you begin to see, can't you, these internal pressures that are facing these new Christians.

Internal pressures, and I can certainly picture external pressures as well in this island. Can't imagine that's an easy place to live for the Lord Jesus Christ.

[12 : 01] Just imagine it. One day you're living just like everyone else on that island. You're living for the same things. You're chasing the same dreams. You're acting exactly the same as everybody else.

And then you hear that the gospel and that the Spirit awakens you. All of a sudden that you're alive. Why? You see life differently now. God has transferred you from the kingdom of darkness, and he's placed you into his kingdom of light.

You were dead, and by his grace, he has made you alive. And he's called you to live differently. So don't be a cheat. Be honest.

Don't lie. Speak the truth. Don't be lazy. Work hard. And so you can imagine if you live out your transformed life, in this culture with these people, you're going to stand out a mile.

You're going to stand out a mile. I mean, check Holy Harry over there. Can you believe that he shares his money and his stuff with these new friends of his?

[13 : 09] Can you believe that? We're off. We'll spend our money on ourselves. Thank you very much. I mean, check Jesus freak Jenny over there as well. Can you believe that when the boss leaves work, she still works?

She doesn't slack like everybody else? We're away as well. Internal pressures, external pressures facing this church. And you begin to see, even just at the outset of this letter, how applicable this is for us.

Actually, we face pressures, don't we, every day as we live our lives as Christians in this world?

Well, I think this letter has got so much to teach us. So much to teach us.

We face the same kind of pressures. And I think that takes us to the purpose of this letter. Or to put it another way, addressing the why question.

So it was a great question to ask ourselves when we're trying to grapple with the meaning of a text, the why question. Why? And this is the thing here. Why is Paul writing these things to this man at this particular time?

[14 : 21] Well, here is Paul. We're going to get to the bottom of this question. Here is Paul. And for one reason or another, he's no longer on Crete. He's no longer on Crete. And he's writing this letter to Titus, whom he has instructed to remain on Crete.

And to do what while he's remaining on Crete? Well, if you check it out there, chapter 1 and verse 5. Paul instructs Titus to put in order what was left unfinished.

Do you see that? So he's saying that there's still work to be done on Crete. And Paul instructs Titus in this letter to finish the work.

Finish the work by standing for the truth. And by silencing those who would speak against the truth. And by modelling for the people what a godly life looks like.

And by appointing leaders who will lead this church well. That's what he's got to do. That's what Titus has got to do. But I think, just I've been convinced the more that I've got to get under the skin of this letter, that actually there's a bigger purpose that Paul has in mind.

[15:39] More holistic purpose. What does Paul want to see happen in this young church? Well, he wants Titus to give himself to the task of seeing this church grow.

Grow. He wants it to grow well. He wants it to grow up. He wants it to grow deep. And he wants it to grow out.

Paul wants this young church to grow. I think there's two particular aspects to this growing. And just as we look at a brief introduction to this letter, let me just outline what I think are the two big aspects of growing that Paul outlines in this letter.

So he wants them to be growing. And he wants them to be growing in their knowing. And he wants them to be growing in their showing. Growing in their knowing and growing in their showing.

Knowing what it is they believe. And showing how what they believe makes a radical difference to the way that they live their lives. Individually and as a community.

[16:49] He wants them to be growing in their knowing and their showing. And I think he sums it up in that phrase that we get right at the beginning of verse 1. And I think this is the big idea of this letter and Paul's beating heart for this church.

What does he write? Their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. Their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. He wants them to grow.

And in terms of their knowing, how does he want them to grow? Well, here's three quick words for you. Just as we introduce ourselves, familiarize ourselves with this letter.

He wants them to grow, first of all, in their delighting. Now, I don't know if you read the BBC website often. I was on there on Friday morning. And I don't know if you saw the story about the elderly couple, Joan and Ken, who were getting married down in Gloucester.

Did anyone see that? You saw that? Brilliant. So I'm not making a... Amazing story about how this couple met. Ken, homeless, smelly clothes, unemployed, raking his way through bins to get meals for the day.

[18:00] Nothing attractive about him. Joan sees him, has compassion on him, befriends him, cares for him, tends for him, loves him. 20 years later, they're due to get married.

I'm reading that thinking, that's pretty cool. But I'm reading it and I'm thinking, what a beautiful example, picture of the Gospel. What a beautiful picture of the Gospel.

And this is what Paul outlines for Titus at Titus chapter 3. We've got it there, look at it there. What does he write? He wants to look at Titus' head around the beauty of the Gospel.

That God saved us, Titus. He saved us. Not because of the righteous things that we did, not because we looked good in his sight, not because we were living good lives.

On the contrary, we were ugly. But he saved us, not because of the things done by us, but he saved us because of his mercy and his love and his incredible grace.

[19:07] And he put his spirit in us. And he adopted us as his sons and his daughters. So that we are no longer orphans.

We are adopted and we are co-heirs with Christ. And we have the hope of eternal life where one day we, as part of the church, will meet our husband, Jesus Christ.

That's what he says. Titus, you've got to delight in that message. The Gospel really is the ultimate rags-to-riches story. Now, Martin Lloyd-Jones, famous Welsh preacher, he used to say that the only thing that humiliated him to the dust and caused him to fall on his knees in worship was when he contemplated the cross of Jesus Christ.

Nothing else will humble us apart from that, that we were not worthy. But nothing else will cause our spirits to delight in the fact that God outrageously loved us in Christ and he forgave us, not cheaply, costly.

And that we are adopted as his children. And that we have a glorious future ahead of us. And Paul writes to this community and says, you have to be a community who delight in that message.

[20 : 23] That you don't just know that message, but you know that message and you love that message. It's a great point to stop and to ask ourselves individually and corporately, friends, do we delight in that message?

Do we delight in the gospel? Would people looking into this church community, would people looking into our lives, would they say that we delight in the gospel? And what are we going to do, really practically, what are we going to do this week to cultivate that delight in the gospel?

Paul wants them to grow in their delighting and Paul wants them to grow secondly in their discerning. as you grow in your understanding of the gospel, this is what he's saying to this community, you've got to see that it's too good to be tampered with.

Too good to be tampered with. You've got to know it well so that you can discern when others are seeking to distort it and twist it and rob it of both its beauty and its power.

And you've got to be able to discern what a life of godliness looks like. Look at verse 11 of chapter 2 if you've got it there. What will the grace of God do in their lives as God transforms them by his spirit?

[21 : 44] What will it do? It will teach them to say no. Now not in our little girl at the minute she loves the word no, she's two terrible twos, no, no, no, no, no, no, no to everything.

It's not that kind of no. It's a no that is choosing to say no to self and to sin and to say yes to the things of Jesus Christ. They've got to discern what a life of worship to him looks like.

What will they say no to? Look what it says, to ungodliness and worldly passions. So the things of their former way of life, the things not pleasing to God, not honouring to him, not worthy of him and not fitting for their new life and their status.

And how are they going to grow in their discerning? Well they'll grow in their discerning by learning. Grow in their discerning by learning. Learning what?

Learning the truth. In my university summers I worked a couple of summers at one of the banks, one in the city centre in Glasgow, one in the city centre in Aberdeen. And he used to train you as to how to spot a fake note.

[22 : 54] The only way to spot a fake note, the best way to spot a fake note is to be so in touch with the real note. Just get the feel of the real note, you'll be able to feel a fake note. It's kind of the same here, isn't it?

How are we to grow in discerning? How are we to grow in separating the false from the true by being so in touch with the truth? So in touch with the truth that we know our Bibles, that we come before God and say, God, would you teach us the truth?

Get familiar with the touch of the truth. Theologian J.I. Packer puts it like this, if I were the devil, one of my first aims would be to stop Christians from digging into their Bibles.

Paul wants this church to grow in their discerning. And lastly, in terms of their knowing, he wants them to grow in terms of their discipling. That yes, they are individual sheep, but they are not to live as individual sheep.

They are to live as part of a flock. And not just a flock, but live as part of a family. And they are to help each other to grow in godliness.

[24 : 08] And you'll see a beautiful picture of this chapter 2. A beautiful picture of what he wants the community life of this church to look like. And it's brilliant.

Look at it here. What does he say? Older women seasoned saints teach the younger women. Older men, you seasoned saints, you teach the younger men.

And this isn't sit around the family dinner table and play a monopoly and play in happy families.

What this is, is Paul desiring a compelling community. A community that cares for one another.

A community that loves one another. A community that takes seriously looking out for one another.

And a community that passes stuff on. Passes stuff on.

Speaks the word to one another. Experiences, knowledge, understanding, awareness, advice, helping one another to grow in the faith.

[25 : 11] Isn't that a wonderful picture of what meaningful and intentional discipleship looks like?

Corporately. It's brilliant, isn't it? It's brilliant. And just as we're passing, let me ask you, as we're at this point, just think about your own life for a minute.

Who's speaking into your life? In the church context, who's speaking into your life? Maybe you want to pray this week that God would put somebody in your heart that you could speak into their life. Whose life are you speaking into? Is there someone in this church family who could play that role in your life? Paul wants this Christian community to grow in their knowing, in their delighting, in their discerning, in their discipling, and he wants them to grow as well in their showing.

So firstly, look at this, he wants them to grow in their witnessing. You've got it there again, chapter 2, verse 9, Paul addressing those in the church who would be slaves, that is, servants underneath a master.

And what does he say? He says that he wants them to live their lives in such a way that you make the gospel attractive. So you live your lives in such a way that you make it look good.

[26 : 34] You've got an ESV there, it says he wants them to adorn the gospel. That's a great word, adorn. And he's talking much less about wearing clothes.

This is not about Christian Dior. This is about displaying Christian character. This is what he's saying, you've got to make the gospel look good. In fact, character is what Paul tells Titus in this letter to look for when appointing leaders for this church, appointing elders.

That they are men of good and of growing and of genuine and of godly character. That their insides are the same as their outsides. That they're the same in private as they are in public.

That's what he wants for the elders of the church. But he also wants it for the whole church. That people would look at them and as they adorn the gospel, as people look at them from the outside, they would question and think, why is it that they look so good?

Why is it that they look so good? Why do they act differently? And not with a big question mark above them, asking it because I want that for my life as well. What is it about their life that I don't have?

[27 : 48] Paul wants them to grow in their witnessing. Secondly, he wants them to grow in their working. big emphasis in this letter on God's people living productive and living fruitful lives for the glory of God.

Maybe note them down and check them out later. Chapter 2, verse 14. Chapter 3, verse 8. Chapter 3, verse 14.

Work hard. People, commit yourselves. Be zealous for good works. And in this letter he criticizes the false teachers. Chapter 1, verse 16.

For not living productive and fruitful lives. In fact, their lives are inconsistent. They are claiming one thing with their mouths and they're displaying another with their actions and character.

There's an inconsistency to the false teachers and that's how you'll be able to spot them. Grow in your working. And thirdly, and lastly, and very much linked to the first two, Paul wants them to grow in their waiting.

[28 : 54] Waiting for the return of their glorious Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Chapter 2, verse 30. He wants them to live in eager anticipation of the day when their master will come back.

And this isn't a passive waiting. This is very much an active thing. He wants them to wait well. And his servants in the present age, what are they to do? Well, they're to work for him, they're to live for him, they're to pursue more of him, and they're just to love him outrageously.

Now, I must say this week in my own life, my own heart, I think this is where I was most massively convicted. That how often the return of my Lord and that glorious day when he will return, like we were singing in that first song, how often does that just never cross my radar?

It never comes into my thought life, and oh Father, would you forgive me that that is true? And would you help me live an eager expectation of the day that you will return to make all things new? How often I just get bogged down with the stuff down here? Did I plan my diary two years in advance? What a vanity that the Lord could take me home to glory tomorrow. D.A.

[30 : 14] Carson, he put it like this. He said, a billion years or so into eternity, the number of toys we accumulated for ourselves during this life will not seem too terribly important.

And do you see, just as we pull a few of these threads together this evening, do you see how radically different this community is going to be from its surrounding community? on Crete, an island full of people renowned for lying and for being lazy, what does Paul tell them to do?

Devote themselves to the truth and devote themselves to working hard. Radically different from the surrounding world. This is why Paul left Titus on Crete, to help this church grow.

That is what he's got to work hard to do. Now listen, we started by joking about what reputations different people have. And I wonder just as I was finishing this this week, I wonder what reputation we have.

I wonder what reputation the church in Edinburgh has. The church in St. Andrews, the church in Glasgow, the church in Aberdeen, the church in Britain, the church in Europe, the church in the world. What reputation do we have?

[31 : 34] As outsiders, they look in and do they see this community? Well, here's something that encouraged me this week. It was an article I read that was taken from the St.

Andrews University student newspaper which is called The Stand. And one of the new students to St. Andrews University, he wrote into The Stand and he gave his thoughts on how he perceived the Christian community as he lived his life on campus.

Now there's a bit more to it on the screen but that's the kind of gist of it. But let me read this to you. It's fantastic. So this is great. This is what he's perceiving right in front of him. He says this, Growing up I thought Christianity was always something for older people.

It was for teachers in primary school, for distant aunts halfway across the globe or your friends' parents who always brought the largest pumpkin to harvest day. People my age meanwhile weren't going to listen to any old type of authority especially the authority of a dusty old book.

We were too young, we were too forward thinking. In short Christianity just wasn't cool enough for us. In St. Andrews however young Christians abide.

[32 : 46] Maybe it's the traditional aspect of the university, maybe it's the town's illustrious history as the religious capital of Scotland. Whatever the reason, and get this, it is impossible not to notice that Christianity is thriving in this town.

It is often said that you can never find a Christian here who you cannot like. And despite having had several bad experiences from a Church of England school, I have to agree that every single Christian I have met here has been lovely.

Isn't that a great thing? As people perceive this Christian community in action, it might have been the student community there, but as people perceive this Christian community, it's our heart for our community that something like that would be said of us.

That people in this community would be glad that we were here, and if we ever left, they would be gutted. And I guess that's, and just to finish off, that's my prayer for us as we journey through this letter together.

And let me finish by just asking you to embrace the prayer. You know, I wonder if you pray for our church here at Bruntsfield. I wonder if you pray for individuals here at Bruntsfield, and I wonder if you do, I wonder what you pray for them.

[34 : 09] Well, it's my prayer as we journey through this little letter of Titus that what we encounter here in God's word is he teaches us by his spirit that these things would become our prayer for our community.

And that we would go further than just praying for our own superficial needs, but actually we would pray for one another that we would grow. Grow individually and grow corporately in terms of our knowing and our showing.

That we would be a community that by God's grace and by his spirit, it grows. And I thought it would just be a great way to end as we respond just to this little introduction to this letter this evening, to pray together.

So what I thought would be great for us to do is just maybe can I ask three people to pray? Just open time of prayer together. Pray for three things for our church family here as we journey through this letter.

Firstly, if somebody wants to pray for our growing, and then secondly, if somebody wants to pray for our knowing, and then lastly, if somebody wants to pray for our showing, and then I'll close our prayer time together.

[35 : 18] But remember, just big loud voices, let's encourage one another with this, and let's just respond to what we've heard this evening, and let's just commit ourselves over this next little while, and over this, or our lifetime as a church together.

Let's just commit it to the Lord. So why don't we do that now, and let's pray together. Father, I ask the Lord that I might grow in faith and love and every grace, might more of his salvation know, and seek more earnestly his face.

Our dear Father, we would thank you for those lyrics that we have of John Newton. Lord, just a passion to see himself and to see your church grow.
And so, Father, we ask that you would help us to do that this week. Lord, help us to grow in our showing and in our knowing, and Lord, that we might just live fruitful and productive lives for your glory.
And so it's through your Son's precious and worthy name that we pray. Amen.