

Doing What is Good: A Trustworthy Saying

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. It's a great privilege and pleasure for me to be with you here this morning to share something from what God has to say. One of the great voices of the 20th century was Francis Schaefer, writer, apologist, teacher.

He would begin his classes in seminary with the following line. One of his students told me this. He said, gentlemen, what you are called to do is not difficult. It is impossible.

Anyone called to work of gospel service, whatever that work entails, is called to do the impossible. Proclaiming the gospel, sharing the gospel, teaching and equipping the people of God is not difficult work, but it is impossible work.

The impossible work that we are looking at this morning concerns one man called Paul and another man called Titus. It occurs in a place called Crete. Now the audience is characterized in this following way.

If you look at the letter to Titus in the pew Bibles at page 998, 999, it opens up and you can see the whole letter on these two pages. So in chapter one, the audience is described in this way. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy glutton. This testimony is true.

[1 : 3 6] Now that's the audience. The apostle Paul is giving the young man Titus a clear commission. He says, Titus, what you are to do is to call out and to equip a people who are a model of good works, who are zealous or eager to do good works, who are ready for every good work, and who are devoted to doing good work.

Now the people are described in such a way that they are unfit, unfit for doing anything that is good. And in this short letter to Titus, you see this phrase time and time again, good works, good works, good works.

Now the Bible makes it quite clear that Christians are not saved because of anything that they have done quite the opposite. We are saved despite what we have done. We are rescued, redeemed, renewed based upon what Jesus has done, his work, and not ours.

But the Bible is equally insistent that if you call yourself a Christian, that your lives should be characterised now by that which is good, and that the work of God in your life is to equip you, to enable you to prepare you, so that your life is now categorised or characterised by good work.

Now Titus, centcrete, is called to this impossible task, and you ask the question, how can he do the impossible? How can you do the impossible? How can we do the impossible? And the answer of course is, we can't. He can't. You can't. And I can't. But God can.

[3 : 2 3] Let me give you a bit of context, because two key events have occurred that make the impossible possible. Now I'm a great student of history. I came to this country 28 years ago to study the history of the Scottish people.

I had studied the American history and so much shorter, so I needed to come to a country that had longer history than our own, so I came here. So I've had a great desire, a great love of history, and I now, I went to that source of all knowledge, the internet.

Last night, and I typed in the question, what are the most important events in the history of the world? I got an interesting list of events. They gave me 25. They said the most important event, they, the internet whoever created this list, the most important event in human history was the digital revolution, the smartphone that you have in your pocket, the computer that you have on your desk.

The second most important event was the assassination of John F. Kennedy. I'm very interested in the assassination of JFK, but to say that that's the second most important event in human history might be slightly exaggerating.

The third was the launch of Sputnik and the space race. The fourth was the Cold War. The fifth was the Second World War. You scroll down the list, the Reformation, Martin Luther in the Reformation comes in at number 15, the Black Death, the bubonic plague that hit Europe in the 14th century, that was 19.

[4 : 54] You come down to 21 and you have the life of Muhammad. Only at 22 do you have a mention of Jesus that 22nd on this list, remember the assassination of JFK was number two, the life of Jesus was number 22. The Bible's list is quite short. The Bible doesn't give you a list of 25 significant events, but rather gives you two.

These two events in the history of God's redeeming plan and purpose make the impossible possible. Let me just tell you what those two events are.

The first event was in fact the life of Jesus, the incarnation of Jesus, that God became a human being, that he came down to live and to die and to rise again.

Now the whole of the Old Testament is written to preview and to plan and to prepare for this great coming of Jesus. That's why the Apostle Paul puts it in chapter two of Titus, for the grace of God has appeared. He's arrived, he's come.

The incarnation of Jesus has changed human history, but the second event is this, not long after. The arrival of Jesus, the incarnation of Jesus was followed not long after by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Pentecost event.

[6 : 16] Acts chapter two, if you're not familiar, read that second chapter of Acts and you see that the Holy Spirit was poured out. Now Jesus has no beginning, he has no end, he always is. The Holy Spirit has no beginning, he has no end, he always is.

And yet in the history of this world, at one place, at one point in time, Jesus Christ became a human being, he lived a perfect life, he died a sacrificial death and he rose triumphant from the dead.

The Holy Spirit was poured out so that the people of God could hear the gospel in their own language, that they could respond to the gospel. And apart from these two world events, we would not be here this morning. You would not be here, nor would I be here.

And the impossible now becomes possible, not because of what you can do, what I can do, what we can do, but because of what God has done.

And with you this morning, I'd like to look at that command or that trustworthy saying, the apostle, the apostle says in verse eight of chapter three. 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.

[7 : 34] These things are excellent and profitable for people. But to understand this trustworthy saying, and you might find it interesting that as you read through these three letters, first and second Timothy and Titus, the pastoral letters, five times Paul says, this is a trustworthy saying.

It's as if he's highlighting or underlining certain key truths that you and I must take note of, not just take note of, take to heart and express in our lives.

But how can we be devoted to good works? If you look just a few verses back, Bill read from chapter two at the end of chapter two through chapter three, and chapter three captures the transition that takes place based on those two events.

Jesus, Holy Spirit. Verse three of chapter three says this, for we ourselves, how easy it is for us to point fingers.

How easy for us is to look down on others or condemn or criticize others, and Paul or Titus could easily have done that here.

[8 : 51] The Cretans were not good people. They were not upright people. They were not honest people. They were not people of integrity or industry. So it would be quite easy to make it seem as if I, they are good, I, we are good or they are bad.

But Paul says, for we ourselves, 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.

The gospel is a message that comes to you and to me and places us in the same category. It doesn't place some on one level and others on another.

But Paul is saying Titus, you and me were just like they are. God by His grace has taken us from where we were and has placed us to where we are.

So in the Christian life, there is no scope for boasting. There is no room for thinking that you or I are any better than anyone else. We aren't.

[10 : 05] The only thing that we can say is that we have received and we have accepted and we have benefited from the grace and goodness of God. So as we look at the world today, do we find ourselves tempted to condemn or tempted to find fault or tempted to criticize and tempted by implication to be satisfied with ourselves or to think that something of ourselves is commendable whereas something of others is condemnable?

The apostle Paul says there's no scope for that because we were in the same boat. We were living the same lives. What we see in this audience in Crete was what was characteristic of our life.

Verse 4 says there was a change because Paul and Titus were no longer there. And if you're a Christian this morning, you are no longer what you once were.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior appeared. The Jesus, the incarnation of Jesus, the arrival of Jesus, the appearance of Jesus transformed our lives, our hearts, our body, our mind, our soul, our eternal destinies have been transformed.

And Paul is able to say in three simple words what the message of Jesus is. He saved us. He saved us.

[11 : 36] I didn't save myself. You didn't save yourself. You didn't save me. I didn't save you. We couldn't do this for ourselves. But he did the impossible.

And if God has done the impossible in your life, does that not give you comfort? Does that give you encouragement? Doesn't that give you hope that if he's done the impossible in your life, then he can do the impossible in the lives of others.

You might be the only Christian in your family. And you might think to yourself, there is no hope. There is no, there's no, they just get impossible. God cannot change the way my family thinks, the way my sister, the way my parents, the way my children, you might just simply conclude that it's impossible.

Well, the apostle Paul says, Jesus, he saved us. And notice this. He saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness.

That's a good thing. Because we don't do that. We don't do works in righteousness. Only God is righteous. Only God is perfect and pure. So that if it came down to what we did, that truly is impossible.

[12 : 48] We cannot live. We cannot do. We cannot act. We cannot respond to God in a way that he is worthy. He is worthy of all praise.

He is worthy of all love. He is worthy of all glory and worthy of all honor. And we constantly fall short of his standard.

We fall constantly short of his expectation. Works not done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.

So the message of the gospel is the impossible has now become possible because of what Jesus has done. He's appeared. He's lived. He's died.

He's risen again from the dead. He lived the life that we haven't lived. He died the death that we deserve to die. He was raised triumphant from the dead.

[13 : 44] Conquering death. Conquering sin. Conquering evil. But that's only one half of the equation. Because you'll notice as we continue reading in verse 5, 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.

It was John Wesley who was converted at the beginning of what became known as the Great Awakening. The Great Awakening was a time in the history of the church where the cause of the gospel was at a very low ebb, where immorality was at a very high level.

At that time, God did a remarkable thing. God changed the hearts and lives of key people in key places and gave them a desire to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

John Wesley's favorite text was the words of John chapter 3 and verse 7, where Jesus said, you must be born again.

And Wesley put it this way, he said, the two great Christian truths are these. Justification, what God has done for us, and regeneration, what God has done in us.

[15 : 15] So the work of Jesus on the cross is what God has done for us. He paid the price, he satisfied the debt, he took our place. But the work of regeneration and renewal is what God does in us, what God does in our hearts and what God does in our lives.

And the work of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential to understanding what we now are in Christ. We are no longer what we once were, we are not yet what we will be, but we are never the same.

Because the work of the Holy Spirit is this, that the Spirit takes that which is dead and brings life from the dead.

Think of the resurrection, Jesus was dead and buried. That is characteristic of our lives before we came to know Jesus. If you're not yet a Christian, that is characteristic of your life this morning.

You're alive, yes, your blood is coursing around your veins, your brain activity, your living. But spiritually speaking, the Bible says we're dead. We're dead in sins and transgressions.

[16 : 26] We need to be made alive, alive again, made new, regenerated and renewed. Now only the Holy Spirit can do this.

So you go back to those two great events, the arrival of Jesus, the incarnation, and the event of Pentecost, the pouring out of the Spirit. So in order for you or I to be saved, it requires all of God, all of His effort, all of His plan, all of His power to transform and to renew us.

Wesley went on to describe what regeneration looks like. He said, the love of the world is changed into the love of God, pride into humility, passion into meekness, hatred, envy, malice, into a sincere, tender, disinterested love for all mankind.

So the gospel message of Jesus comes to you through the power of the Spirit, and the Spirit comes into the hearts and lives of dead people, makes them alive, and makes them new, makes them whole, so that now instead of living lives that are characteristic of evil, lives are now characteristic of good, instead of living lives that are characterized by selfishness, lives are now lived characteristic of selflessness.

So when Paul in Titus chapter 2, 11 says, for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce on godliness and worldly passions.

[18 : 07] So when the Holy Spirit is at work, you now begin to say no. We're previously all you wanted to do was say yes, and likewise the opposite is true, and to live self-controlled upright and godly lives in the present age.

The Holy Spirit, when He renews, when He regenerates, takes you and me, and instead of saying no to God, we now say yes. Instead of saying yes to ourselves, we begin to say no. We begin to think differently. We begin to act differently. We begin to live differently.

The impossible, now possible. The Cretans, who were once liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons, these are people who can be zealous or eager, who can be equipped and devoted to doing that which is good.

And it's all down to God. It's all down to the work of the Son on the cross and the work of the Spirit in the heart and in the life of the believer.

In the 18th century, before the preaching of Wesley and Whitfield, the England and Great Britain was described in this way.

[19 : 24] It was described as a moral quagmire and a spiritual cesspool. The gambling was so rampant that the country was described as one vast casino.

Drunkness, immorality, the statistics say that 97% of those who were born poor in workhouses died as children.

One observer commented that morality had collapsed to a degree that was never known in any Christian country.

All of a sudden, God pours out His Spirit. People like Wesley, people like Whitfield, people like Jonathan Edwards, their lives are transformed and through their ministries, the world is transformed.

John Wesley, who becomes a preacher of the gospel, it's estimated that he preached 40,000 times. If you're good with math, to preach 40,000 times, you have to preach 800 times a year for 50 years.

[20 : 30] That's a lot of sermons. It's estimated that he covered 250,000 miles on horseback. That's a lot of miles. And he constantly proclaimed this message that alone can save, that Jesus Christ is Lord, that He lived, died and rose again, and that the Spirit Himself must take that which is dead and make alive.

So the Spirit regenerates and the Spirit renews and the Spirit is poured out richly upon us through by the grace of our Savior.

We are justified, we are renewed, we are sanctified, we are made whole, we are made new. So that's a context. Liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttonies, now made a people who are eager to do what is good.

But we're no longer in Crete in the first century. We're here in Edinburgh. The same message is being proclaimed. The same Son, the same Spirit is at work. But what is characteristic now of your life? Is your life a life that is characterized by good works?

Paul doesn't describe what these good works are. He doesn't give us a list. But he says these things are excellent and profitable for people.

[21 : 51] We live in a country where possibly 95, 96, 98% of the population has no meaningful connection with Jesus Christ. So the number of Christians are few and the number of those who don't believe are many.

But that gives you a unique opportunity because if there are few who believe, those who do believe should stand out. Those who believe, those who are Christians in Crete should stand out. Why? Because they're no longer liars, they're telling the truth.

They're no longer evil, they're doing what's good, they're no longer lazy, but they're zealous, they're eager to do what's right. So the Christian in Crete should shine and stand out in such a context.

The Christian in Scotland, the Christian in Edinburgh should stand out against that backdrop. Why? Because we're now a people who have an eagerness and a desire to do not what we want, but what God wants.

Not what does us good, but what does other people good. So the work of the Gospel begins on the inside, begins in the heart.

[22 : 57] But that transformation of heart and that transformation of life is seen on the outside. A couple of hours ago this morning I was preaching in Edinburgh Prison.

Now in Edinburgh Prison the problems are more obvious. The doors are locked. I mean, I'm pretty sure if you wanted to leave right now you could leave. When I was preaching two hours ago you can't leave, you just can't get up and go because you're in a prison, the doors are locked.

You look at the guys and you can see that there are problems, they've had problems in their lives. And yet the same Gospel comes with the same power. There's no Gospel for good people and Gospel for bad people.

There's only one Gospel because there's only one type of people. We are a people who need help. We need God to do for us and in us what we cannot do for ourselves and what we cannot do in ourselves.

So whether I'm preaching at the clue where I'm normally based or here in St. Columbus or in Edinburgh Prison, there's no different message. It's the same message. It's the same Gospel, it's the same Jesus, it's the same Holy Spirit.

[24 : 02] So the Apostle Paul could say to Titus and Crete or he could say to Timothy and Ephesus or wherever or whoever, the message is the same. The challenges are the same, but the opportunities are great because if you have come to know Jesus and if you have been made new and made alive by the Holy Spirit, your lives should now be a testimony of the grace of God, a testimony of the power of God, and the lives that you now live should speak.

There are very few people today I would suggest in Scotland that will naturally seek out a church service, there may be some, but most people are not queuing to come to church.

But ask yourself, wherever God places you, home, community, work, study, what are people hearing? What are people seeing? What are people observing in your life? What testimony are you giving?

Now of course all of our testimonies are flawed and limited, but if we come to know Jesus, if we've come to experience His salvation, if we've enjoyed this new life and this new beginning through the Spirit, one thing must be true.

We can never be the same people again. We can never live exactly that same way. We can never have the same attitudes, the same actions, the same desires, the same interests.

[25 : 31] Why? Because God has taken up residence in our lives. He's given us new hope, new direction, new priorities, new motivations, new desires, and new interests.

So no matter what God has called you to do, go into that impossible situation, into that situation at work or into your home life or into your community and say to yourself, God, you're calling me to do the impossible, but I'm persuaded you've already done the impossible.

You've done the impossible in my life and you can do the impossible through my life. If you're not yet at that point where you recognize who Jesus is or what Jesus has done for you, let me just tell you this, that He's come for people just like you.

He's come for people whose lives are not complete, whose lives are not sorted. He's come for people who need help. He hasn't come for the good. He's not come to make good people better. Jesus himself said he's come to call, not the righteous, but he's come to call sinners to repentance.

So if you've come to this point and you think maybe I'm not on the right road, maybe I'm not going in the right direction, maybe my life to this point has not satisfied me and when I stand in front of God it will not satisfy him.

[26 : 55] Maybe God is speaking to you today and reminding you that you need Him to do the impossible in your life, to save you, to renew you, to give you hope, to give you forgiveness, to give you grace, to give you mercy.

All is readily available and richly available through Jesus Christ our Savior. And then you can join the ranks of those who are now eager, equipped, ready and prepared to do that which is good.

Be careful to devote yourselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. We have unique opportunities of serving the living God. God has placed you where He has placed you for a reason.

The good work that you can do, only you can do it. Only you can testify to the grace of God in your life with word and with action.

And just see how God continues to do the impossible. Let's pray. Father, I thank you for your work for us and your work in us.

[28 : 07] We thank you for the arrival of Jesus into this world, that He lived that perfect life and died that death of sacrifice. It's our prayer that He would be at work today, in this place, in our lives, at the Holy Spirit whom He has poured out.

Richly would continue that work of regeneration, that work of renewal, that work of transformation. Lord, we are not capable of doing this ourselves, let alone doing this for others.

But you are more than able to do the impossible in our lives and through our lives. Lord, you know some of the challenges that each one of us is encountering. You know some of the heartbreaks and some of the concerns that are on our minds right now.

And so often we conclude that the situations that we find ourselves have no easy answer, if any answer at all. So give us that faith to trust in you. Give us that hope to look beyond our circumstances to you, our God.

And give us love. Give us love for Jesus. Give us love for one another. Give us love for the gospel and for your Word. And enable us to be a people who are dedicated, devoted, eager, and ready to do that which is good.

[29 : 23] You get all the credit. You deserve all the glory. And all the praise is yours through Jesus. Amen.