

A Life to Die For

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[0 : 00] But I'd like us to turn back this morning for a little while to Titus chapter 3. We're taking a break this morning from our series on Mark's Gospel, a little break, a little breather, and then we'll go back to next Sunday, God willing.

I'd like to go back to this passage in Titus and look again at the passage that I read at the very beginning of the service. We'll go back to it in a moment.

But it's very important for us that our Christianity, it speaks into our culture, that we take the truth of God's Word, that we take the truth of Scripture, and we're able to apply that truth and live that truth in the culture that we are living in.

And in order to do that, we need to know that culture, we need to know the specific temptations, the issues and the challenges that living in a specific culture brings.

The culture we live in in Western Europe might be very different from Asia or from South America. I'm not saying our Christianity is different, but how we apply our Christianity and the temptations and the struggles and the battles may be different wherever we are.

[1 : 24] Now I'm not in any way a cultural analyst, but I want to highlight one aspect today that may be a challenge for us in our Christian lives, and I've probably mentioned this before, but I want to take one of the challenges we're living in our culture and apply it to our Christian lives, and then look at the core realities of what we believe, because we're celebrating the Lord's Supper. I hope that you'll not think, oh my goodness, I've heard this before, I know this stuff, I want something deeper and more meaningful. I hope that you're able to find these core realities as realities that mould and shape and govern our discipleship.

So, looking at one challenge that may be brought into our Christianity because of the culture we live in, and that is that our Christianity, it's easy for it to become consumer-centered.

We live in a consumerist society and a consumable society, and it's easy for us to therefore take the same attitudes that we find govern the thinking of our society and apply them to our faith. Where we see our faith in Jesus, and where we see the church, the body of believers, as simply added value, something that is there to meet my needs, something that is good for me, something that will make me feel better, that's significant at that level. Now all of these things have a relevance about them, but the danger is when they become the perspective that we have in our Christianity, because the logical conclusion of thinking like that is that when it's not adding value, when Jesus isn't meeting my perceived needs, when it doesn't feel good for me, and when I don't feel better on a day-to-day basis, then I will ditch this, and I will be disappointed by it, and I will feel let down because of it. If we have a consumerist idea, if our idea of the Gospel is that it's consumable, something we take, something that we can balance and value and consider a separate reality to our beings, an addition to what we are, something we add on, rather than something that is fundamental to our very basis. A life we could maybe summarise it, a life maybe in parenthesis and brackets, a life maybe to enjoy. You know that consumerist mantra, a life to enjoy, so a life in brackets maybe to enjoy. Now there's elements of truth, and

I hope I'll come back just to finish with a recognition of elements of truth within that. But if we have a consumer based idea of Jesus and what he can do for us, and what he can give to us, and what he can offer to us, at our level, on our basis. If that is what we consider Christ in the Gospel to be, then it becomes rootless and vulnerable. Vulnerable to our feelings, vulnerable to our situations and our circumstances, and vulnerable to challenges from other, more appealing realities. So our consumer-centred Christianity is opposite in many ways to what Jesus teaches, and what Jesus speaks about, and what Jesus tells us is significant for us. And the difference is that biblical Christianity is a cross-centred Christianity. It's not consumer based, it's cross-centred. So if you're consumerist you have a life to maybe enjoy, but in Christ, with a cross-centred Christianity, you have a life to die for. That's the fundamental difference you have a life to die for. Can you remember going back, we've looked at this again and again in our studies in Mark, in

Mark chapter 8, verse 34, 35, therefore he called the crowd to him and said, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me for whoever wants to lose his life, whoever wants to save his life will lose it, whoever wants to lose his life for me in the Gospel will save it. That is not a consumerist mantra. That is not something that is appealing at a human level to us. Consumerism is me-centered. I am the arbiter of truth. God is in the dock. God needs to meet my standards, needs to give me what I need. And the cost of lordship, the cost of falling onto my knees, the cost of giving up in order to follow Jesus Christ is too much in consumerist thinking. But this is so significant because it speaks of both coming to Christ and also discipleship, and it's the focus of our communion. That's why the focus of the communion, the sacrament that God has given us, is the death of Jesus Christ, is the cross, is the crucifixion.

[7 : 08] The sacrament is not about Jesus' birth significant and important though it is. The sacrament isn't even about the resurrection. Utterly significant though that is each Lord's day, we worship and recognize the significance of the resurrection. But the resurrection cannot happen without the death of Jesus. And the death of Jesus is the core, the cross-centered core of our faith. We know nothing among each other except Jesus and Jesus Christ crucified.

Dying to self-rule, dying to spiritual consumerism, dying to an ego-centered view of Jesus and of me and of the world. And that's a massive change that we'll just unpack for a minute or two this morning. Titus chapter 3, if you'll turn with me to that, and to these words in verse 4 through to verse 7. Now at the end of that 4 to 7, Titus, Paul speaking to Titus says, this is a trustworthy saying. This is a trustworthy saying. And that is believed by many people, many commentators. A trustworthy saying was a saying that had become common in the churches, like a creed. This is an important statement. And it's almost, it's delineated, it's given to us almost a bit like a creed. Like the basic pillars of truth that was being passed down that people knew about in the church. And in the original, it's just one long sentence. So it's as if Paul takes a big breath of, and then speaks this great truth without a full stop and comes to the end. When this kindness and Savior of

God, our Savior appeared, he saved us not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renew by the Holy Spirit who we poured out on His generously through Jesus Christ our Savior. So that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs. Having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. This is a creed. This is a crucial creed. It's a basis for our faith. These truths share and tell us and help us to understand a summary of what we believe. I think it would be good for us to memorize it. It wouldn't do me or you any harm and do it would do us good to memorize this because it gives us a framework and an understanding of what is important in our faith in a Christ-centered Christianity. What is the significant element of what is the significant language element here? What's the significant image that we have in this creed, this short and succinct creed that we're given? It's the language of rescue. It's the language of rescue. That's the core of our creed. God, our Savior, he saved us. He saved us, we're told twice. This is a trustworthy saying. So we've got here at the core of this creed, this important creed, this reality, this language of rescue so that today in St. Columbus as we profess our faith in Jesus Christ and as we sit at the Lord's table, we're a people who sit. We're a rescued people. That's what we are.

We're a rescued people. We're a people who've been saved. And that is the significant reality of a cross-centered Christianity for us today as opposed to a consumerist based one. It's not life enhancing. You don't sit at the Lord's table. You haven't become, and I haven't become a Christian because it makes me just better than what I am. I have a certain amount of goodness. Jesus makes me better. It's not life enhancing. It's not an add-on. It's not a spiritual vitamin supplement. It's not like going sunbathing where we feel better. We're still alive but we go sunbathing in a vitamin D's and we feel better. It's not like that.

It's not adding value or health to us physically or at a spiritual level. It's not life enhancing. It's life giving. We see that difference. It's not something that we look at with a consumerist mentality. It's life giving. We've been rescued. A self-centered life chooses sin and doesn't know God and doesn't love God. That's the reality that God reminds us of. We are a people who are broken under God's judgment, facing death, and the consequence of that is it's relationally separation, ongoing and irreversible separation from God.

[12 : 18] We have all this scare language of hell and the pictures of fire and darkness and demons with horns so that people mock and laugh at that reality. The biblical picture is relational.

It's a separation that we see now although we are deceived not to see it. But it's a separation that death, which is in itself physical death, is a separation of body and soul. It's then an ongoing irreversible separation from God. If we don't see that and if we don't see ourselves as God sees us, rescue isn't something that we look for. If we are comfortable, if we are content, if we are consumers of God, then rescue isn't an issue. Redemption isn't an issue. Concern about our spiritual condition is not an issue. If we don't recognize what God has said, what God says about our condition and what we need to receive from Him to escape from that condition, it is life giving. If we make Christianity simply a life choice, we are doing a grave disservice to Jesus Christ, to the cross and to the good news of the gospel and to our own condition. It's not life enhancing, it's life giving.

But in the paradox of the gospel, it is also life losing. It's life giving because we receive life and forgiveness and hope from Jesus. But it's also life losing because we are getting rid of this self-lordship, this self-centeredness, this ego-centered understanding of the world that we live in. That is hugely significant for us. As a Christian of nearly 30 years, I find that more of an issue today for me than it's ever been. An ego-centered view of my life and of my future. The battle is to keep Christ in that place and His Lordship. We are losing our self-dependence and the sinful self-dependence that rejects God from that. We stop in our lives. We work with the power of the Spirit to stop self-diagnosing our condition and also stop self-medicating. Oh yeah, I think I know what I need. I think

I know how I can live. I know what I can change. I know what needs to be balanced in my life. I know what I need to get rid of. Self-medicating is such a dangerous thing to do physically, isn't it? And we're doing it all the time now with the internet. We self-medicate all the time. We've got a cough and the next thing, we've got to play because we look down at various things and we get it wrong and we think that we don't need to train and we don't need doctors or we don't need medical assistance because we just go on the internet.

Wikipedia. But we do the same spiritually, don't we? We self-medicate. Jesus, it's great what He's done but we don't need Him. I know what I need just to read. There's fine tuning that's needed. That's all. There's changes here and there. I can come to church now and again and I can have a spiritual dimension that is consumerist that we're taking it but we're doing it on our own terms. Self-medicating spiritually. But what we're reminded of here is that the deception of sin is that in verse 3, one time we were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy hating, being hated and hating one another. Now that's not a declaration of the way we live all the time, that there's this kind of maelstrom of hatred going on. I know there's a lot of human levels, a lot of love, and there's a lot of human goodness towards one another but spiritually before God we're enslaved by that self-centered reality and also by the reality that we do hate others. We looked at that last week with jealousy, didn't we? A jealousy above all in envy is hating God, hating God for not giving us a better life, for not putting us in a better place, for not giving us more gifts. We hate

[17:15] Him for that. But it's a recognition that we're losing the ugly, tarnished, brutal, self-centered perspective of our lives. This is a language of rescue. And who is it that rescues us? Hugely significant as we look through this. Again, it's not self-help. It is God our Savior. He saved us. Memorise that. Memorise this creed that takes us back to basics. You're sitting today at the Lord's table as a member of St. Columbus or as a member in another congregation, professed faith, and you're coming in and you're saying, God is my Savior. He saved me. And it's a humble submission and acknowledgement of our need of rescue by Jesus Christ. And many people look at that and say, this is a denial of human responsibility. People will say, we hate Christians because Christians don't take responsibility for their own condition. They just say they're helpless and they rely on Jesus. And it's a kind of, it's a denial of getting your own life right. And it's for weak-willed people and also people who are making excuses for their behaviour. That's absolutely not what the Bible teaches. It doesn't teach that we're denying responsibility.

It teaches that we are recognising our need. There's a great difference. It's recognising that we can't put our own spiritual lives and lives generally in order. We need Jesus Christ. If you have a tumour in your stomach, it is not a denial of your responsibility to ask or to seek a surgeon to operate on that, to remove that tumour. It's not that you're being irresponsible and say, well, I could do that myself. No, of course not.

It is, it is recognising your need that you can't, you can't heal yourself. That you can't deal with that tumour. You need to be healed. You need someone to save you. And that is the Christian position that we recognise that Jesus is the one we need. And here we're given these great descriptions of who God, our God, our Saviour, remember, God our Saviour and Jesus is. He is the one who is kind with kindness and with love and with mercy and with grace. When the kindness and love of God appeared, He saved us because of His mercy and then further down verse 7, having been justified by His grace. Jesus appeared. He appeared with these characteristics. Was your God like? Is He harsh? Is He oppressive?

Well, He's God. Yes. He's a God who exposes our sin absolutely. He's a God who will return in judgment correct because He's just and holy. But He is a God who is loving, kind, merciful and gracious. And the testimony you have as a believer at the Lord's table today is that that's the Lord that you know. He appeared. He showed Himself. He came. He lived.

He lived and He was rejected. This God of the universe and the person of His Son came and humanity couldn't look at Him. They couldn't look on His perfection and His glory and they crucified Him. But in God's purpose, that crucifixion becomes our redemption. As you know, the great transaction. He takes all our sin and our guilt before God and we receive when we trust in Him, His righteousness. He takes, the Bible gives us great picture.

[21 : 15] You know, the Lord's table is about visual things, pictures, bread and wine. He gives a great visual picture, doesn't he? He takes off old dirty stained clothing, our sin, and He gives us righteousness, His perfect clothing to cover us so that we are right with God.

So it's never self-rescue. Never sit at the table saying, I'm good enough to be here. I've earned the right. It is a recognition that we have to die to that attitude and live to the living God. He rescues us. He does this and He imparts to us His gift of grace.

He says, we are justified by His grace. That is the greatest four words in the Bible, justified by His grace. You know, the judge is who condemns or who sets free, doesn't he? We will all stand before Him, condemned or set free. And He says to the believer, because of what Jesus has done, you set free. You're justified. You know what justified means? It just means made right. Well, it's a legal term. You're made right. You're declared innocent. You know, a computer screen, you can justify the wording. It's a straight line, either side.

And it's been made straight, made right before God. This legal declaration of the judge says you're justified. Why? He doesn't look down the list and say, well, you've tried pretty hard here and you've done your best there. You're a minister for 30 years by His grace.

That is what we stand and sit for the Lord's table on His grace. Nothing that we are asked to do but accept that and the consequences of that. At that level, we recognise what He's done. And because of that, we have this huge and amazing future hope so that we come ears and having the hope of eternal life so that for us death is not so much a door, is more of a door than a cliff. It's a door into a fuller and better and more real experience with God. So He gives us the gift of His grace to cleanse us of the fears, but also the gift of His Holy Spirit. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit whom He poured out on us generously in Jesus Christ. He gives us His Godness.

[24 : 17] He gives us His Holy Spirit. He pours out Himself. You know that these late chapters of John's Gospel is all about that, that Jesus says, I'm going, I'm going back to heaven, I'm going via the cross and then I'm going to be ascended, but I'm not going to leave you alone. I'm going to give you God back. I'm going to give you the third person of the truth, God the Holy Spirit and He will be with you. I'm going to pour Him out. I'm not just going to dribble Him from heaven in a tiny little portion that you'll be gasping for air and thirst for. I'll pour Him out as you recognise and see your need of Him.

There's so much more, isn't it, than just life enhancement, a life subset, a life improvement. It is spiritual life poured out by the Holy Spirit. That's why the Bible calls it rebirth.

Rebirth. Bob was talking last night about that, how it's become a kind of pejorative term in the States. You're not born again Christian. His father, who was a believer, was challenging him with that truth. It has become a pejorative, partly I think, because it's misunderstood, but the reality is a biblical term and the truth is for us that it's as if we are reborn, because we are reborn, because we were reborn from the inside out. We are a new creation. It's a new beginning. Now, I don't know, I mean, a Simone made by these words, but I can take them. It's a new dawn. It's a new day. It's a new life. I'm feeling good. And the Christian can say that. And therefore, the feeling, which sometimes we look for in a consumerist way, God must give me this and I need to feel good about it.

It's not the basis for our faith. It's not why we believe. It's not what we're looking for. But when we come as those recognizing cross-centered Christianity and recognizing what we've been redeemed from and what we're given, it is a new dawn. It's a new day. It's a new life. And I am feeling good. And we shouldn't be ashamed of that, even in all the battles and in the struggles that we face, because Jesus Christ is with us and He is received.

We have received from Him. So this is a trustworthy saying. This trustworthy saying is, I believe a Christian creed, an early Christian creed. It's a life changer. If we will allow it to be, it is a life changer. That we don't look at our Christianity today. I really hope we don't. And we battle, I certainly battle against, I don't know if you do, that we battle against an understanding of God and grace that is consumerist. We're not new consumers. We're new creations. That is a huge difference. As consumers, we are old self with all our grumbles and moans and complaints and bitterness against God and hatred against one another and pride and envy and jealousy. We're not new consumers. We're new creations. It's something big to sit at the Lord's table. It's something really big to confess that I need Jesus Christ and

[27 : 47] I've taken Jesus Christ. It's glorious. And this Gospel, sorry, this letter, this short letter, is with this creed kind of in the middle of it, is a letter that takes that creed and recognises what it means. And it means that we live to do good for Jesus Christ.

There are consequences in the church, as Titus speaks about, in the home, as Paul speaks to Titus about, and in the world. So I'm not giving this kind of spiritual creed. You might be thinking, well, I'm struggling with exams this week. I've got a battling in my marriage this week. I'm struggling to believe this week. Let's not say we take these and we just isolate ourselves from these things and pretend they don't happen. But this creed, this recognition of being new creations impinges on all of these things and our attitudes to them and our recognition of the help of God we have in these battles which are temporary for us.

So the Lord's table is for our encouragement, to focus on Jesus, what He's provided and given to us, the rest of it is ours. And the blessing of what He has done on our behalf is overwhelming grace so that we can sit at the Lord's table and know that we are justified.

Made right with God. Not because of anything we've done, but because of Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Lord God, help us we pray today to understand your gospel, to understand this great tradition, this great truth, this great deposit, this great creed that focuses in our lives, who we are and gives us a wonderful identity in Christ. A new creation from the inside out, yes being moulded, yes often we feel like jars of clay with this precious message, this precious truth, but new nonetheless and being renewed. Worth enthusing about, worth encouraging one another over and worth thinking about at the table together. We thank you for every Christian here and for the testimony of Jesus having justified them by His grace. We thank you for Roy and we pray you bless him in his life and that you would watch over him where he moves on from here as he moves on to study elsewhere. And we look forward to his baptism with us in the next few days. And we pray for Jackie that you bless her in her testimony and in her coming to faith and growing in faith and committing to the congregational life in this way. And we pray for each of us that we would know blessing today as we sit at the Lord's table. And for any who might not be believers today, we pray that they would be challenged, that they would consider the message and consider this coming to faith and trust in Jesus Christ and all that it means. So help us God we pray for be asked in Jesus name. Amen.