

Prayer

Lord Jesus, meet us today wherever we are, whatever we do and wherever we go. May we recognise Your voice, feel Your touch and be warmed in our hearts. May we make a conscious effort to do what is right in Your eyes, not because You might condemn us for what goes wrong, but because You love to empower us to do Your will. Thank You for Your real presence with us in the world by Your Spirit, Lord Jesus: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Seasons

It is winter in the Northern hemisphere, but people living south of the equator are currently enjoying summer! Thank God for the seasons and the ever changing state of our world.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks to the Lord for the health you enjoy
- Pray for those charged with the care of children in need
- Pray for all who suffer and have no access to medical care

Meditation

Show us Your glorious power O Lord;
Come to the help of those who need You.

Come to the aid of the poor and needy,
Raise them up and show Your love!

Come to the aid of the are sick and distressed,
Restore and heal, help and deliver!

Come to the aid of those who are lost,
Rescue and love them, lead them to faith!

Come to the aid of Your broken people,
Renew Your church and rekindle its zeal!

Come to the aid of Your waiting people,
Revive their hope and lead them to glory!

Show us Your glorious power, O Lord;
All is possible in Your love and care.

Bible Study - Titus 2:11-15

¹¹ The grace of God that brings salvation has now appeared to all, ¹² training us to renounce wickedness and worldly desires, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³ while awaiting the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ He gave himself for us so that He might set us free from all sin and purify for himself a people of His own who are eager to do what is good. ¹⁵ Declare these things; encourage and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

Review

This is a profoundly challenging text. Of all that is said in this brief letter, today's text probably stands out as the highlight, encapsulating the Gospel in the space of a few words

and offering us some advice about the manner in which the believer should approach the life of faith whilst living in an ungodly world. Such highlights appear in most of Paul's letters, and all of them express the centrality of the Gospel of Salvation (2:11,14), the avoidance of evil and renouncing of sin and wickedness (2:12) and an encouragement to share the Gospel (2:15). The fourth element of this text is the motivational comment found in verse 13, referring to the coming of Christ in glory, but this theme is not always mentioned by Paul in his great summary explanations of faith (as in Romans 3:21-26, or Ephesians 2:1-10, for example).

The centrality of the Gospel Paul's first phrase is an astonishingly condensed description of Jesus Christ; 'the grace of God that brings salvation' (2:11). The popular mnemonic 'God's Reward At Christ's Expense (GRACE) can be helpful in enabling people to understand something about 'grace', but the word itself has deeper strands of meaning within scripture. These can be found by observing that the Old Testament word lying behind 'grace' is the word 'favour', in the sense of 'unmerited love, generosity and favour'. The saving work done by God through Jesus is His free and unmerited favour towards all, and there is a considerable emphasis here on the word 'all'. The grace of God found in Christ is universal, as well as unmerited and free!

Later, Paul says more about how salvation and what it means (2:14). 'He gave Himself' is Paul's phrase encapsulating all Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection; it does not simply express Jesus' dying. Jesus gave of Himself when He taught and when he delivered people from demons, and Luke records uniquely that when people came to Jesus early on in His ministry 'power came out of Him and healed all of them' (Luke 6:17), and that Jesus said 'I noticed that power had gone out from me,' when he healed the woman with the haemorrhage (Luke 8:46). Jesus undoubtedly offered Himself for us when he gave up his life at Calvary, but He did this at the culmination of a life of self giving which set people free, and the godly return He received was resurrection and eternal life with the Father, as He now promises us!

This is the Gospel preached by Paul, which was used by God to establish a 'people of His own who are eager to do what is good.' (2:14); a phrase expressing the undivided intent of those who truly seek to follow Christ.

The avoidance of evil and renunciation of sin The nature of salvation is that whilst it is an offer to all from God, through Jesus, it is only available to people ready to renounce wickedness and evil and follow God's ways exclusively. Some struggle with this part of the Gospel today, because many attend church and yet live openly recognising that they have many flaws, and call themselves 'Christians', seeing no reason to change their lives. In such instances the heart of the Gospel has been compromised, but it is not God's way to reject people because of their lack of understanding. Rather, it is His desire that they should face the problems of sin and deal with them, rather than living with them. They should 'live lives that are self controlled, upright and holy' (2:12). This call of God never ceases, and if it is not heard within the church, then perhaps the church has a problem rather than the people who attend it!

Encouragement to share the Gospel The last verse of this passage tells us to do two things; firstly, 'declare these things', that is, speaking openly about the Christ in whom we believe. Some people find this too much and prefer to deal with the challenge by labelling those who practice it as 'evangelicals' and defining their own style of religion as something else. But no Christian can avoid this call from God's Word. The Lord does not expect us all to respond to Him in the same way, but His call to declare the Good News is not negotiable, and the failure of God's (Old Testament) people to accept their covenant responsibility to be a 'light to the nations' (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6) remains the primary reason for God's rejection of the Jewish people. Moreover, Paul adds, 'encourage and rebuke with all

authority, because he clearly believed that issues of responsibility such as this could and should be hammered out in love and understanding.

The Lord's coming in glory The last element of this great text is found in verse 13. The true believer is someone who awaits the return of the Lord. This is not a form of creed, or a matter of spirituality or optional belief, but an essential truth about God and how He works in the world. Eventually, what we now know will cease, either at our deaths or at His coming, but we will all meet our Maker one day. The only question is whether we are ready to live with this in mind, as scripture always tells us, or whether we prefer to ignore such a thought and live according to our own scheme of things.

Again, there is much confusion in the church today about the coming of Christ, and much teaching that is confusing. Frankly, what scripture says is relatively straightforward; Christ will come, we do not know when, and we must behave as if it was about to happen. Live by this, and you will not be far from what both Jesus (Matt 24) and Paul said and wrote.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss what you mean by the 'grace' of God in Christ Jesus. What does it mean to you and what does it mean to the world?
2. In your group, brainstorm ways in which people can share their faith using 'words' as scriptures bid us.
3. How helpful do you find it to reflect on the second coming of Christ in glory?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This great text is a treasure of scripture, and yet I have never heard anyone preach from Titus! It is commonly reckoned that the message in Titus is rather limited and inexpressive of the depths of what scripture says elsewhere. The text we have read today teaches us that we do not need to have a great many words in order to express deep theology. I have found it hard to provide even the briefest of summaries of this text!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Read through this text a few times, and let your mind dwell on what it says. Let the Holy Spirit open up this Word to you and help you come to terms with its challenge and also the great wisdom, love and generosity of God; that is, His 'grace'.*
- *Pray for those people who attend church but struggle to come to terms with some of the essential truths of Christian faith; in other words, they are seekers, whether they would accept this definition or not. Pray for God's blessing on them and for His love to provide them with those Christian leaders and friends who will help them on their journey of faith.*

Final Prayer

You, Lord God, have given to each of us our home, our families, our places of work and our places of worship. May we honour You by respecting all who share these blessings with us, and by fulfilling Your command to 'love one another'. Hear this our prayer, Lord God, and establish Your Kingdom in our midst. AMEN