



## Sermon #6 - Titus 3

Jesus in the real world

*Good at work*

### **KIDS WEEK!**

Hey listen over the past week we had right at 100 kids join us for Mercy Kids Week. It was awesome, tons of fun. kids made some new friends, heard the gospel, and many of them are from families brand new to Mercy Church. If you served at kids week I want you to stand up. Can we thank these men and women!? I love our church. Kids ministry isn't just a program we run on Sundays. We believe it's a partnership with the whole family and when a whole family encounters God's love... a beautiful, powerful change comes to that home and to the people around them. So thank you to our volunteers and to you parents who entrusted your kids to us this past week.

### **Introduction**

We are in our last sermon in our series here in the book of Titus. And our theme for the series has been believing for the Long Haul. We said a lot of people approach faith like a weekend road trip. Where you have a fun experience, its an emotional high with a cool memory or two, like discovering coffee flavored M&Ms at the gas station in W.V.. and then return to everyday life. And people tend to treat their faith like that where you all you have is a momentary spiritual experience. maybe your spiritual road trip was Christian summer camp. Maybe it was a kids week!? John Christ did a great bit on this where he said kids week or summer camp is just where we put a Christian label on activities. We don't call it simon says we call it jesus says. 4 square? Nope... father, son, holy spirit, & you square. I went to so many of those. And they are good. I believed the gospel for the first time at a summer Christian camp for high school students. Mediocre guitar player sang like 15 verses of Just as I am. And so I went down & trusted Jesus. Awesome moment.

I know our kids had a good time this week and some of them took that step too.

But listen camp came to an end. Kids Week is over. Road Trip is over. No more pie in the face for Mrs Gloria. AND SO MANY PEOPLE, like me, never transitioned their faith from an experience to a way of life. They don't know how.

And this letter is God saying your faith was meant to be WAY MORE than a road trip. So we said we gotta think of our faith as a permanent move. Where you load up the truck and wave goodbye and start a new life. This letter is all about believing for the long haul. A belief that enjoys the emotional highs for sure, but then has the power to get down into the everyday and radically change everything, forever. A belief that becomes your new home.

Long haul faith is the kind of faith where your friends start saying “He’s a totally different person now.” When your boss says “Their concern seems to have shifted to how they can help others.” spouse says “his love for me is so much more visible than ever before.” Long Haul faith doesn’t just entertain you in the moment, it forever changes you in visible tangible ways. And here is how we summarized the big idea of long haul faith

**Believing for the long haul means your eternal destination sets your present course of action.**

All of Paul’s letter is saying the great hope of the Christian message is it’s answer to the ultimate long haul question. What happens when you die? We all ask it. And how we answer that question shapes how we live our lives.

It does. If you believe nothing happens...you live for the moment. Gotta get all your experiences in. But those never satisfy so that belief always leaves you empty & sad. If you believe there’s a heaven type afterlife that everyone goes to & there’s no hell because God is love, that sounds awesome on twitter but presents a giant

problem because again if everybody gets IN morality on this earth doesn’t matter. That’s the hitler problem. Any heaven that he gets into is bogus. And if you say “well I mean bad people don’t get in...” well now you are in a whole new belief system about the long haul that apparently has a moral standard to live up to. But who sets the standard? Christianity puts all people on equal footing.

And for Christians our eternal destination is heaven. An eternity in the presence of God in a joyful relationship with God. So chapter 1 said I am accepting my identity as a citizen of heaven and I’m going to live as a part of that kingdom while I’m here on earth. Which means I have a perspective on momentary things that others crave but can never find. It means things that I thought really mattered start to lose their power over me. Even death looks differently. Used to be a coffin I feared and now it’s a door I’ll be carried through when it comes. Chapter 1 was how my future shapes my present.

Chapter 3 looks back at the act of Jesus and shows how that act informs my present. How the past act of Jesus informs my present course of action. Which brings the Christian perspective into full view. In just 3 chapters Paul is showing you how the Christian looks ahead at heaven, and back at the cross, at the same time. And we commonly call this “the already not yet.” I’m already saved by what Christ did, but I’m not yet home.

And as we close up Titus we are closing with what long haul faith produces. **Our common past & our common future gives us one common purpose in the present**

**age.** I'm not going to tell you it out front. Little bible study test run. We'll go through it and see if you can identify it. And then I'm going to show you how that purpose plays out personally, at home, at work, and in society.

[1] Remind them to submit to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, Ok remember one of the big confrontational things in this letter is that the Christian message says part of believing for the long haul is surrendering your will. You are no longer in charge, God is. And in fact, God puts people here on earth to oversee you as well. Elders in the church, older men and women who serve as a sort of spiritual parent to you, then there is the laws of the land that you submit to. Not going to spend time on how much that can be abused. Let's say this: God calls us to peaceful submission to rulers and authorities except where they call us to an action that would be in defiance of God's law. In those instances we try to maintain respect for those in authority while refusing to comply with any action that would cause us to disobey God. Civil Rights Marches and sit ins are a great example of this in action.

And look what he says we are to be ready for: Every good work.

The Christian church is to be on alert...think of an on call doctor...they are trained and actively awaiting the chance to perform good works...

[2] to slander no one, to avoid fighting, and to be kind, always showing gentleness to all people.

Two things to do and two things not to do. I want you to notice what is underneath these because it sets up everything for today. The two things not to do - they are responses of a person trying to preserve oneself by tearing down someone else. Either behind their backs through slander or to their face. These are where we drift when we are concerned with self. He says don't be concerned with self, but be kind & gentle...be concerned with others. that's the thesis of everything today. That you were never meant to live a life of self-increase and the end of that life is emptiness. But to give yourself for the increase of others, as upside down as it seems, is actually where fulfillment is. **In Short: the way up is down.**

[3] For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one another.

Now Paul clearly says there is a separation between Christians and the rest of society. We were once living concerned with self-actualization. We were told "you do you. Be your own self and don't let anybody tell you what to do. Don't submit to anybody else's version of you. Be you and get yours. We are told that's true freedom ...but living for your self is actually a form of bondage to a pretty brutal master....yourself And your desire to make something of yourself leads you to malice, envy, hatred & detestment of others. Or depression when you feel you just don't measure up & are done trying. See all of these descriptions are how you interact with other people. And that's because you

see yourself in competition with them. You want to rise to the top.

This right here is why the T.V. show survivor is currently in its 36<sup>th</sup> season. That was just a summer replacement show idea and it changed television. Because we are seeing an only slightly exaggerated form of our own lives. When we follow our culture's command to be about self-fulfillment we don't have friends, just alliances. And we have plenty of enemies. And we watch survivor like "Don't TRUST HER! LOOK SHE'S TALKING BAD ABOUT HER I KNEW YOU COULDN'T TRUST HER!" And you have that same conversation about the people in your life! I hope they don't vote me off the friend group island.

And living in that...in that fear & insecurity...Paul says its foolish. It's deceiving you. That isn't true life. INSTEAD...Get ready...Get ready if you are new to Christianity get ready. Here comes our hope and we get excited right here. It's the core of what we believe and I think you will find it speaks to you

[4] But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, [5] he saved us— not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy – through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

We were trapped in self-fulfillment. We couldn't escape it. It's like the Mirror of Erised in Harry Potter. Potter nerds you guys remember that? The name of the mirror was the word desire spelled backwards. It showed people what the desires of their heart. And Dumbledore

said men have wasted away before it. Enslaved to it. It's a picture of mankind...longing for what he doesn't have but thinks will give him comfort when he gets it. We can't save ourselves from ourselves. But when the kindness and love of God appeared. And it's a PERSON. Kindness and Love are a person...he saved us. We didn't earn our freedom...we were wasting away thinking about ourselves. But he looked at us sitting there and loved us. LISTEN GOD LOVES YOU! NOT BECAUSE YOU ARE GOOD ENOUGH TO BE LOVED. You are a wreck but he loves you. Two things happen in what we call "salvation." See the beauty of this moment is you and I get to look inside the word "saved" like opening up a watermelon and seeing all the deliciousness that is in there... Here's what happens in salvation. 2 things:

- **When God saves you he makes you a new person** - The washing of regeneration is a sermon all to itself. In short the washing refers to God taking your criminal record. And scrubbing it clean. So now there is no record of your sin. That's the metaphor scripture uses to talk about Jesus' blood being poured out so yours didn't have to be. We don't have to live in the torment of past sin. We've found forgiveness. Regeneration means your record isn't just clean...you are made into a new person! The old you still exists physically but you are, as Jesus says to nicodemus, born again! WHICH MEANS...YOU ARE FREE FROM YOU! Those voices in your head telling you that you aren't worth being loved, or that you need others to like you, or that you will

always feel depressed, or that you just gotta escape to that bottle or to that screen or to that other person who isn't your spouse...The New You...doesn't buy that. When God saves you he makes you a new person. Means you have new ears! Some of you have said you trusted Christ but you are still listening through old ears.

- **When God saves you he gives you a new spirit** - New Spirit...God says he's making you a new person because he is taking up residence in you. And when he moves in he cleans house. So catch this Christian...according to God's word in John 14. The very instant you decide to take that step of belief. Which is to resolve in your heart and mind that Christ died for your sins and you believe he's your savior...That moment of surrender God makes you a new person AND THEN takes up residence with you. **GOD SAVES YOU & GOD STAYS WITH YOU!** So now you have not just a new spirit but THE spirit of God that is constantly renewing you. Renewing your desires from old desires, renewing your mind from those old voices, showing you what is going to be good and changing your desires from the things that used to harm you.

how many in here when I say you were a messed up lost person but through Christ God made you a new person & changed everything and it was good. How many of you have experienced that? Put your hands up put your

hands together I don't care but God has made you new and you better celebrate!

[6] He poured out his Spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior [7] so that, having been justified by his grace, we may become heirs with the hope of eternal life.

We aren't done...His spirit is on us...and he was not stingy with that spirit. He was **GENEROUS!** And now justified. **FINALLY.** We are justified. Made righteous. Not because we deserve it. We were sinners. But by his grace. In an instant God leveled the playing field. All humanity is equal. Equally sinful and all humanity has **ONE** way to be restored to God. To be set free from self bondage. His grace. And I'm **NOT DONE YET...NO NO** look the promises keep coming on us like a waterfall... We are **HEIRS.** We aren't just freed people. We are sons and daughters. We are legally guaranteed **ETERNAL LIFE.** So that believer who passed away...he or she is not in a coffin, they are with Christ in eternity! In a world of bad news and fake news this is Good News and True news and is cause for celebration!

[8] This saying is trustworthy. I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed God might be careful to devote themselves to good works. These are good and profitable for everyone. Paul only does this a handful of times. And here he doubles down. He says the gospel is trustworthy. And then he says **INSIST** on these things. Here's why:

- We are so prone to forget the gospel and drift back into our old selves. And even though

we've believed this gospel message we find ourselves seeking approval again and again. And so Paul says INSIST ON THE GOSPEL! NEVER STOP WITH IT! KEEP TEACHING IT! And today some of you need to believe it afresh.

And he says insist so that the believers will be careful to devote themselves to...what??? GOOD WORKS! Because good works are good and profitable for everyone. Instead of fighting...that's verse 9 [9] But avoid foolish debates, genealogies, quarrels, and disputes about the law, because they are unprofitable and worthless.

This is rebuking, a second time, the same thing he rebuked in the opening chapter. There were people in their midst stirring up disunity because they kept adding to the gospel. These were people with religious backgrounds and they were trying to add to the gospel by saying you need Jesus AND you need to obey Jewish dietary laws. And people were saying I can't be a part of this. Today that would be you need Jesus AND the right political platform to be a true Christian. You can't be a Christian if you drink...ever heard of churches arguing about worship styles?

Let me put it this way:

**When we focus on ourselves, preferences become priorities. When we focus on others, their needs outweigh our preferences.**

So Paul says to Titus...make sure they are doing what Christ did. Instead of focusing on himself, the bible

makes a big point to say he disregarded himself to do a good work for us. To give us salvation.

So Paul finishes, the 2<sup>nd</sup> to last verse of the letter... [14] Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works for pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.

So now you are ready for today's big idea. 3 times in this closing chapter Paul has said "our people"; God's people are to be devoted to one activity...Not fighting but instead...they are to devote themselves to....all together...GOOD WORKS.

*Good job! Listen sometimes people feel like the bible is too hard to read. I'm telling you if today is your first day with the bible you can go read a New Testament letter like Titus. Try James or Phillipians you could read either of those in like 15 minutes and you can understand them!*

Ok so if good works is our action step...the big giant question is...WHAT QUALIFIES AS GOOD WORKS? If I help a little old lady across the street does that count? And honestly I've NEVER had that scenario happen to me. I could go sit at trade and tryon and wait on an old lady but she'd probably be on one of those scooters you can rent and would knock me over. But is that it?

A good work is a demonstration of Christ's love. The motivation for our actions is the gospel. And listen this is MASSIVE: we have to allow the gospel to shape how

we think about helping others. Practically here's what this means:

- **A good work is helpful** - I hear this from our ministry partners throughout Charlotte. Sometimes churches will call them and say "Here's what we want to do when we come volunteer with you." And big props to you guys, especially Mrs. Jill Ferguson who runs our local outreach efforts because she always asks "how can we help?" And deeper than that we need to recognize all people have stories and we'd be far better at good works once we sought to be active learners of people's stories & circumstances. Otherwise what you think will be help might actually be harmful. There is an important book called "when helping hurts" that talks about how first worlders (you and I) can sometimes think we are bringing a good work to a community in the 3<sup>rd</sup> world and actually do more harm than good. "For every pair of our shoes you buy, Our organization is going to provide a pair of shoes for free to every person in this village." Which ends up putting the local shoe maker out of business and makes the whole village permanently financially dependent on outside aid. Why not help build small businesses instead? In fact...listen because this might be a big takeaway...Good works know and meet real needs.
- **A good work is self-sacrificing** - Jesus sacrificed himself for us. So we sacrifice ourselves for others. The reason I say that is because sometimes, usually not intentionally, we let our calendar determine whether or not we will obey God. Like: I would stop for that car pulled over but I GOT SOMEWHERE TO BE. I would go tutor but I've got Hot Yoga. Ya'll I feel this. I've got 4 kids and if we say yes to 1 activity for them we multiply that by 4 and then we collapse on the couch at night like what just happened. Listen: Good works will almost NEVER EVER be convenient. It will require sacrifice. So if you have the opportunity to display the selfless love of Christ to someone and you MEASURE IT AGAINST THE SELF-FULFILLING ACTIVITY... and you say which would you RATHER do? SELF will win. Netflix will win. But if you are going to obey Jesus here, SELF has to DIE! It will always be less convenient to serve others.
- **A good work is God-honoring** - Not every good work needs come with a bible verse slapped on it, but every good work does need to be in line with God's commands. That's because he alone is truly good. And his design is what is good for human flourishing. So truly good works will never conflict with God's commands for your life. So in college my buddy asks me to drive him to south campus. Simple good deed right? We get down there and he says 'park the car' ...goes behind a

dumpster and comes back out shuffling his hands in his pockets and says lets go. Sketchy but whatever. Well it took very little deductive reasoning to realize my friend was a rookie drug dealer. And once I figured it out he asked if I could give him rides every so often. Self-sacrificing, helpful...but not God-honoring. Nah bro. Be gracious with yourself in gray areas but God never calls you to a good work that would jeopardize your character.

Good works demonstrate Christ's love. And that makes the church God's demonstration community. That's why most effective ministry happens outside the walls of the church in spaces where a Christian is demonstrating the love of Christ to someone else.

Now let me take the last couple of minutes and show you how the gospel motivates good in the four main arenas of life.

1. You become more worshipfully obedient to God in your private life - See the more you dwell on the gospel, the more you become aware of your own sinful desires. Think back to verse 3. We were ONCE enslaved to those desires. But not anymore. Listen perhaps the greatest thing God has set me free from is the two-faced life I used to live. Where I was one guy in public but another in private? See that new spirit in you...when you allow it...actually makes you more worshipful in private than in public because you are concerned with an audience of ONE not an audience of many.

2. You are able to be a more self-less Family member - Can we just be honest...NOBODY knows us like family. I would also put roommates in this category. The people you live with see you at your rawest. And when you start to abide in Christ...and the Spirit of God starts to change you...they are going to be the first ones to notice it. And those good works will come out in you having a more self-less spirit towards them. You will demonstrate Christ's love to your kids when you put your phone down and go play soccer in the back yard. You will demonstrate Christ's love when you do the dishes, even though that's not your job, and you don't hold it over them FOREVER. You offer forgiveness instead of vengeance. You offer repentance instead of excuses. The goodness and loving kindness of God become yours!

3. Your work changes from an occupation to a calling. I'm not talking about slapping Christian things up around the office. Or opening a coffee shop and naming it He-Brews. I'm talking about the deep work of allowing the gospel to change your motivations for work & even what you label as success.

What will make me the most money and give me the most status? Needs to be replaced with "How, with my existing abilities and opportunities, can I be of greatest service to other people, knowing what I do of God's will and of human need?" GOOD...WORKS.

If the point of work is to serve and exalt ourselves, then our work inevitably becomes less about the work and more about us. Our aggressiveness will eventually become abuse, our drive will become burnout, and our



self-sufficiency will become self-loathing. But if the purpose of work is to serve and exalt something *beyond* ourselves, then we actually have a better reason to deploy our talent, ambition, and entrepreneurial vigor - and we are more likely to be successful in the long run, even by the world's definition.<sup>1</sup>

What if WORK was meant to be your greatest space for Good Works!? What if the love of work could be replaced with love at work. People think real ministry is for pastors. That's crazy. My job is to equip you for ministry. You have the platform, at whatever level you are in your work, to serve others. Some of you are at the level you can really dream about your company's bottom line and my question is how is that bottom line serving OTHERS more than yourself?

4. We become God's demonstration community to a watching world

A few months ago I preached a sermon on Jesus' command for his followers to be salt in the world around them. And he says salt, which brings out flavor & also preserves, is only good when its salty. Salt is only good when its different from the meat and therefore can be useful to the meat. When Christians, who live in a world of self-actualization, choose to be self-sacrificing, it sets them apart & creates a reason for the world to look in and wonder.

Amish School Shooting 2006 - 5 school girls killed and shooter took his life. Within hours, amish gathered

around parents of shooter and wife/kids of the shooter. And said we want to walk through this. Of course people immediately responded with "How could you forgive?" and then news heralded it as "America at its best." But 2 years later 3 sociologists wrote a book called "amish grace" and said no, this isn't America at its best. Because America preaches a consumerist message of ME. This act was self-less. It was not vengeance but instead forgiveness. America doesn't have that. In fact the reason they were able to do this is because the amish live cut off lives from the self-actualization message of America. They were able to say "because of the self-less act of Jesus on my behalf, I am able to live for God and for my neighbor. I have everything I need."

Road Trip faith will never get you to that moment. Only long haul faith will. Kay Warren, a Christian author and wife of a mega church pastor...went through the horrible loss of her son who committed suicide. Kind of out of nowhere she tweeted this out this week and ya'll it summed up a lot of what we are getting at in this letter:

"Someone recently asked how I survived my son's suicide. I told him I've sent my spiritual roots deep into the character of God for more than 50 years. Circumstances tried to brutally rip out the "tree" of my faith - but the roots held."

This is long haul faith. Sending roots deeper into God's love every day. You are sending your roots somewhere. I

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<sup>1</sup> From Tim Keller's book *Every Good Endeavor*. 58.

implore you send them deeper into the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's pray.