

# Truth for Today

*The Bible Explained*

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## The Greatness of the Lord Jesus: A Great God

This morning we finish off our series on the greatness of the Lord Jesus by reminding ourselves that in his letter to Titus, Paul describes the Lord as *“our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2:13). Over the past two weeks we’ve thought about the Lord Jesus as the Great Shepherd, who watches over His sheep, and as the Great High Priest who intercedes before God the Father on our behalf. What then does Paul have to say to Titus about the Lord Jesus that we can learn from?

Although the phrase *“our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ”* which forms the title of today’s talk occurs in Titus 2:13, Paul’s short letter to Titus actually contains three sections that tell us about who the Lord Jesus was and the great things He did. They occur in Titus 1:1-4, Titus 2:11-14, and Titus 3:4-7. You might like to think of these three sections as the spine around which the whole of the book of Titus fits.

You’ll have noticed if you have read through the New Testament that not all of the letters have the same feel or tone to them as you read through. Philippians reads very differently to Romans for example. Some of the letters seem to focus much more attention on explaining right doctrine, whilst others seem to focus more on practical application of Christian teaching. Obviously, no New Testament book is useless for either purpose. Whichever New Testament book you read, you’ll find things to help you learn and things to help you do. I’m just pointing out the obvious fact that each letter of the New Testament gives these two aims different weighting.

Titus seems to be one of the more practical focused books of the New Testament, especially when you consider

- The conduct required of elders in Titus 1;
- The advice given to all generations in Titus 2; and
- The things to avoid and things to learn in Titus 3.

However, I want to suggest to you this morning that the three sections of Titus that teach us about the character and work of the Lord Jesus form the springboard for all the practical advice that fits in around it.

You see, what we believe affects how we behave. In particular, what we believe about Jesus affects how we behave. Even on a very basic level that’s obvious, isn’t it? If you believe that Jesus was just some well meaning wise man from many years ago that will clearly influence how much weight you give to the instructions of the New Testament in a different way from if you believe, like the Apostle Peter, that *“Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (see Matthew 16:16).

So this morning we will go through these three sections of Titus that teach us about the greatness of the Lord Jesus, and in each case see how they act as the catalyst for the practical teaching that surrounds them. My aim is to spend most of the time thinking about the things we are taught about the Lord Jesus, and then to just give a sketchy outline of the practical consequences given in Paul’s letter to Titus. Even though Titus is just a short letter, it would be an impossible task to give a full exposition of this book in the 25 minutes we have together today!

I also appreciate that not everyone listening today will be so familiar with the book of Titus that they will immediately recognise all the verses I’ll necessarily refer to without refreshing your memory by looking over the verses in your Bibles. I certainly wouldn’t be able to! Don’t be discouraged by that. Why not visit the *Truth for Today* website, [www.truthfortoday.org.uk](http://www.truthfortoday.org.uk) to download either a transcript or an audio file of this talk so that you can think over it with an open Bible when you have some time later this week?

So, let’s start with the first of the three passages in Titus that speaks to us about the greatness of the Lord Jesus. It occurs right at the beginning, Titus 1:1-4. Listen to what Paul says: *“Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Saviour; To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.”*

There are a few key points to highlight from Titus 1:1-4. The first, and most obvious point comes at the end of Titus 1:4. The Lord Jesus is great because He is our Saviour. He has given us the *"hope of eternal life"* that is mentioned in Titus 1:2. Jesus is great because He has made a way for us to be rescued from the judgment that our sins deserve. What a wonderful truth! Just as clearly as the Bible records that we have all sinned and deserve God's judgment, it records that the Lord Jesus is the Saviour who came to save people. Do you know Jesus as your Saviour? Have you trusted Him to save you and forgive you for your sins? Do you believe that His death on the cross was sufficient to deal with the judgment your sin deserved? Or are you relying on some other way to earn God's forgiveness, or just hoping everything will be OK in the end? Rightly Peter says in the book of the Acts, *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

The next thing to notice is that as well as referring to *"the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour"* in Titus 1:4, Paul also mentions *"God our Saviour"* in Titus 1:3. This is an important reminder that the Lord Jesus was God. Our Saviour is not just anybody. He's not just some man. He is God. What an encouraging truth! Christians don't rely on just anybody to take away the judgment they deserved because of their sins. They rely on the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God. God Himself has brought about salvation.

Humans are characterised by their rebellion against God. To put it in biblical terms, we're known for our sinfulness. But the Lord Jesus isn't like that. He is God. He was right in all that He did. He wasn't characterised by sin (see 1 John 3:5). He did no sin (see 1 Peter 2:22). He never knew any sin (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). Every thought was right; every action was right; every word was right and proper for the situation. If our salvation had relied upon a man, no matter how good as we might judge, there would always be a question as to the suitability of their taking God's judgement in our place. After all, even if they were the very best of men, they would fall under the condemnation of the Bible, *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). So they would have their own sins to answer for. How could they answer for mine and yours as well? But praise God, we don't just rely on some man. We look to *"the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour"* (Titus 1:4). Can we be sure He was suitable to stand in our place and bear the judgment for our sin? YES! He is God.

The final key point to notice from Titus 1:1-4 is found in Titus 1:1. The good news of the Gospel is here described as *"the truth which accords with godliness."* This is the key point in explaining the practical points that follow in the chapter. Paul says that it is his acknowledgement of this truth, that is his agreement with it, or acceptance of it, that qualifies him to be an Apostle and to write this letter to Titus. If Paul didn't accept the truth of the Gospel, his words would carry no authority whatsoever, no matter how wise men might think them.

The Gospel, the good news that Jesus Christ had come and had died to save people from their sins and that, through faith in Him, men and women, boys and girls could find forgiveness of sins and all the other great blessings of salvation, is described by Paul as *"the truth."* It's the truth told by *"God who cannot lie"* (Titus 1:2).

As we read through Titus 1:1-16, we see that there were some people in Crete who clearly didn't believe that the Gospel was the truth.

- There were some people who had begun to contradict Christian teaching (Titus 1:9);
- There were some who had become insubordinate, who were idle talkers and deceivers (Titus 1:10); and
- These people had gained such an influence amongst the churches in Crete, that they were subverting whole households, teaching them things that they should not, to gain things for themselves (Titus 1:11).

Perhaps that is a reference to financial gain? These people needed to be stopped and rebuked (Titus 1:13). For this reason Paul writes to Titus and tells him to appoint elders in the churches in Crete and gives a list of qualification for such men in Titus 1:5-9.

We can begin to see the link now between what we believe and how we behave. Paul starts his letter by emphasising that the Gospel is the *"truth which accords with godliness"* (Titus 1:1). What kind of men would be suitable for dealing with these difficulties in Crete? Only men who, like Paul, acknowledged *"the truth."* They would need to be men who *"hold fast the faithful word"* (Titus 1:9). The only way these elders could begin to deal with the problems in Crete was by reaffirming the truth of the Gospel.

But notice as well that Paul describes the Gospel as *"the truth which accords with godliness"* (Titus 1:1). That is, the kind of truth that leads to godly behaviour. The Gospel is a life changing truth. Not just a set of things to store as head knowledge. Throughout many of Paul's letters we come across people who seem to have come up with quite complicated teachings and doctrines that subverted the Gospel. But these teachings led to wrong behaviour. The

Gospel on the other hand, leads to godly behaviour. So the elders that Titus was to appoint were supposed to be characterised not just by an acknowledgement of the truth, but by godly behaviour as well.

- They were to have led their families well (Titus 1:6);
- They were not to have short temper, or a lack of self control when it came to wine, violence or money (Titus 1:7); and
- They were to be known for being hospitable, loving good things and their just conduct (Titus 1:8).

These were the kind of men who could help sort out the problems in Crete. We might say they were men for whom what they believed about Jesus affected how they behaved. I wonder how we measure up to these standards?

These faithful men stand in contrast to the people described in Titus 1:16 who *“profess to know God, but in works they deny Him.”* This is a reminder that Christianity isn't just about head knowledge. The Gospel is the truth which accords with godliness and what we believe should affect how we behave. Which of the groups of people in this chapter are we most like? Are we like the faithful men who could be appointed as elders or those who profess to be Christians but their works say otherwise? May the Lord help us to be people who, like the Apostle Paul, acknowledge *“the truth which accords with godliness”* (Titus 1:1).

We've now reached the end of Titus 1, and can move to the next section of the letter which describes to us the greatness of the Lord Jesus. The key section comes in Titus 2:11-14, so we'll start there and then, once we've seen what Paul tells us about the Lord Jesus, we'll look back over the chapter to see what the implications of these truths are in the practical instructions given. Listen then to Titus 2:11-14. *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”*

In this section we learn more about the greatness of the Lord Jesus. He's the greatest demonstration of the grace of God towards mankind. Paul puts it *“the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared”* (Titus 2:11). The Lord Jesus, and the fact that He came into the world to save sinners is the supreme confirmation of the fact that God is gracious towards us. What a reason to be thankful to God! What a cause for praise! Never forget that God shows grace towards us.

He is *“our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2:13) which reminds us of the point we made in Titus 1:3 that the Lord Jesus is God. This section goes on to explain what our great God and Saviour has done for us.

*“He gave Himself for us”* (Titus 2:14). The Lord Jesus died in our place. What a wonderful truth. He was willing to offer Himself before God, to take the punishment I deserved. I'd done wrong, He hadn't. And yet He was willing to stand in my place. Surely we marvel at statements like this. We couldn't make them if they weren't in the Bible. It's not as if there is anything specially wonderful about me that would make Him willing to make such a kind offer. But by the grace of God, *“[He] bore [my] sins in His own body on the tree”* as Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:24. *“The Lord Jesus loved me and gave Himself for me”* as Paul writes to the Galatians in Galatians 2:20. What a glorious truth! Have you accepted His offer to stand in your place?

The next thing Paul mentions is that the Lord Jesus redeemed us (Titus 2:14). This is the idea that we've been freed from the hold that sin had over us. In addition to this, Paul says Jesus has *“...purified for Himself, His own special people”* (Titus 2:14). Christians are people whom God has chosen for Himself, and the Lord Jesus has made us suitable to be His people. For what purpose? That we might be *“zealous for good works”* (Titus 2:14). Surely *“good works”* cover such a wide range of things that might profitably be done for the honour and glory of our Lord Jesus.

We should mention, too, that this section mentions the Lord appearing twice. Titus 2:11 reminds us that the grace of God appeared. That's a reference to the first coming of the Lord Jesus to this world, when He was born in Bethlehem and ultimately died on the cross at Calvary. But we know that wasn't the end. He rose again from the dead in glorious resurrection and went back to heaven. The privilege of Christians today is to wait and look for the *“blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2:13). Jesus is coming again! He came once to give Himself for us and redeem us. He's coming again to take Christians to be with Him for all eternity. What a glorious truth!

How do the truths about the greatness of the Lord Jesus presented in Titus 2 influence not just our thinking, but our behaviour? I think this time the key point to note is that the Lord Jesus gave Himself for us so that He might purify us for Himself, His own special people. Christians are saved to be people who are different from those in the world

around us who don't believe. Our aim in life is to reflect the fact that we are His special people. Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ purified us for this purpose, so that we might be zealous for good works.

That's the reason why in Titus 2:12 Paul says we are to deny *"ungodliness and worldly lusts [but instead] live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age"*, that is, while we wait for His glorious appearing (Titus 2:13). When we face situations where we are tempted to act in ways that we know the Bible says we shouldn't, we deny ourselves that opportunity. Why? Because we've been purified to be Christ's special people. When we find ourselves yearning for all the things the people around us yearn for without any thought for the Lord and His purposes we should deny ourselves the right to think like that. Why? Because our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ purified us for Himself, to be His own special people.

Because we are the Lord's special people we are to be zealous for good works. That means we look for every opportunity to do good to people. This reminds me of what Paul writes to the Galatians: *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith"* (Galatians 6:10)

As I mentioned before, the phrase *"zealous for good works"* surely has a pretty wide scope. As you go about your work, or your family life this week, or as you interact with your friends and neighbours, look for opportunities to do good to them. Why? Because the Lord purified you to be His own special people.

I think this key idea seems to help us understand Titus 2:1-10 as well. In Titus 2:1-8 Paul gives instructions to old men, old women, young women and young men. In all of these cases with a little bit of consideration you can see how most of the behaviours described, whilst obviously good and wise might not be the most natural response in us. That's why Paul needed to give the instruction. But the Christians in Crete were to be different to the people around them who weren't believers. Why? They had been purified to be the Lord's special people. They weren't exactly the same as before they were saved. They had been changed and now what might have been their natural inclinations before should not be anymore.

Since we still want to cover Titus 3 today, I'll leave you to think over the implications for whichever of the categories in Titus 2:1-10 you fit, and see how the fact that, if you're a Christian, you've been purified by our Saviour Jesus Christ to be His own special people. The challenge for each of us is to be obedient to the Lord's instructions.

So then, we'll finish off this series and today's broadcast in Titus 3. The section of Titus 3 that describes the greatness of the Lord Jesus is found in Titus 3:4-7, so as usual that's where we'll start before we'll look at the rest of the chapter to see how belief about who Jesus is affects how we behave. Listen to what Paul writes: *"But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."*

In Titus 2, the appearing of the Lord Jesus into the world was described as *"the grace of God that brings salvation"* (Titus 2:11). Here in Titus 3:4, Paul describes it as *"the kindness and love of God"* appearing. Just as the coming of the Lord Jesus to save us shows us how gracious God is towards us, so it is the fullest demonstration of the kindness and love of God. This is another truth that should draw out from us praise and worship. What a way God has chosen to show us He loves us and is kind to us! How great the cost of rejecting the kindness and love of God!

In Titus 3:5 we are reminded that salvation is possible, not because we do sufficient good or righteous things, but only because God shows mercy to us and makes us fit for heaven and relationship with God through regeneration or new birth. We're reminded in Titus 3:6 that our Lord Jesus is great because He has poured out the Holy Spirit upon us abundantly, as a guarantee of the fact that we have been justified by faith and become heirs together of eternal life. What a glorious future awaits the Christian! No matter how difficult the circumstances some may face today, we have the great hope of eternal life all because of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. I don't mean to minimise the suffering some face today. I'm well aware that some believers suffer infinitely more than I ever have, and I in no way want to trivialise that. But I do want to remind us all that for the believer, our sure hope is that we will one day be with Christ which is far better (see Philipians 1:23).

Perhaps the key point to take from these verses is that the Lord Jesus makes Christians different people. People who are *"heirs according to the hope of eternal life"* (Titus 3:7) are different from before they were saved. People who have been washed with regeneration and renewed by the Holy Spirit, are different to how they were before they became a Christian. Why do I say that this is the main point to take from the passage? Because in Titus 3:3 Paul gives a long list of things that *"we ourselves were also once..."*

- They used to *"be foolish, disobedient, deceived";*

- They used to “*serve their own lusts and pleasures*”; and
- They “*lived in malice and envy and hated one another*”.

But they were different now. Now these Christians in Crete were supposed to put into practice all the things listed in Titus 3:1-2. They were supposed to be subject to rulers and authorities instead of being disobedient. They were supposed to be ready for every good work. Now they were supposed to refuse to speak evil of anyone instead of being “*hateful and hating one another*” (Titus 3:3). Now they were supposed to be peaceable and gentle instead of “*living in malice and envy*” (Titus 3:3). Now they were supposed to show humility to all men. What had changed?

“*The kindness and love of God our Saviour had appeared*” (see Titus 3:4). According to God’s mercy, He had saved them, He had washed them and He had given them the Holy Spirit abundantly (Titus 3:5-6). So they were different now that they were Christians. How wonderful that God had not expected this life change to come about all by themselves. The believers in Crete had not just been on a self-improvement course. No! God had provided them with abundant resources to help them in the new life that was expected of them now they were saved. They were given the Holy Spirit to renew them and dwell within them. He would guide them towards right actions and right thinking. He would remind them not to go along with all the actions that are listed in Titus 3:3. He would tell them “That’s what you used to be like, but you’re different now.”

The life changing implications of the salvation provided for us by our great Lord Jesus continue to be seen in the rest of the chapter. The Cretians were to be careful to maintain good works (Titus 3:8) because they were changed and had the Holy Spirit’s help. They were to avoid foolish disputes and divisions (Titus 3:9-10) because they weren’t foolish, hateful or envious anymore. Instead of only serving their own lusts, they were to care for the Lord’s people and use their financial resources to send Zenas and Apollos to Paul quickly (Titus 3:13). Instead of being hateful and hating one another, they were to meet urgent needs of others (Titus 3:14).

Are these evidences of the changed lives of saved people present in our lives? Would people say of us, “You used to be like this but now something is different and better about you”? Are any of the instructions in Titus 3:1-2 or Titus 3:8-11 things that we have chances to do better on this week?

So, we’ve now finished our series on the “Greatness of the Lord”. Over the past few weeks we’ve thought of Him as the great Shepherd and the Great High Priest. Today we’ve been thinking of Him as our great God, and as we’ve had this brief tour through Titus I hope we’ve seen how what we believe about the Lord Jesus impacts how we behave.

To borrow the words of Titus 2:10, my prayer is that as we understand more about who the Lord is and what He has done for us, our lives would increasingly “*adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*”

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