

Title: More than you can imagine
Text: Titus 1:1-9
Theme: The church and the plan of God
Series: Titus #1
Prop Stmtnt: There is more going on in the church that you can really imagine.

Read Text:

The island of Crete (not to be confused with Cyprus) sits in the Mediterranean Sea south and east of Greece. It is one of the most beautiful of all of the Greek islands and the home to a history that spans several thousand years. Crete was a focal point for Paul's church-planting ministry and the result was Paul and his team established several churches there. In order to help these young, impressionable and vulnerable churches establish a healthy root system; Paul left Titus in Crete to continue to work with those churches.

Titus, like Timothy came to faith in Christ as a direct result of Paul's ministry and was mentored by Paul and traveled with him. Titus was a Gentile and since many of the early churches had a strong Jewish element to them, the very presence of Titus in the church, much less in a position of leadership, challenged stereotypes and forced many of the early believers to confront the issue of race and racial tensions.

I do not think that you can understand the NT epistles as you are intended to, unless you realize that the backdrop of so many of these churches is racial tension. Does that make sense? When you see a play on a stage, the stage will have a backdrop. Many times you will have a curtain that is painted as a city or some other scene that provides the context for the story. In order to understand the storyline, you need to know the backdrop. Well, the backdrop for so much of the life of the early church was racism because the metro areas where the early churches were started in all dealt with that problem. Think of what had happened over the past several hundred years. The Assyrian race (and army) had conquered much of the world and asserted their superiority. Then the Babylonian race (and army) conquered them. Then came the Medes and the Persians whose empire was destroyed by Alexander the Great who not only conquered the world militarily, but he spread the gospel of Greek culture all over it, only for that to get overrun and replaced by the Romans. In each case, there was a distinct race of people who conquered other races and asserted their own superiority. But, one race defied and despised them all and that was the Jewish race. The Jews survived, it seemed, because they were loyal to their own. They took care of each other and not only protected one another economically, but they had a history and practices that reinforced their Jewishness. In all of these cities, the Jews worshiped together, lived together, banked together and oftentimes treated other races as being inferior to them. Needless to say, there was not much love of the Gentile world to the Jews and there was certainly no love from the Jews for the Gentiles.

Then comes the church, which was started by a Jew and initially led by Jews whose stated aim was to make a new nation out of many nations, a new people out of many people who follow one King – Jesus. This new kingdom would not have an army, would not have a land with borders, but it would have embassies (churches) that would serve as

outposts for this kingdom. These outposts, or embassies were supposed to be a taste of what life in the kingdom of Jesus is supposed to be like, where we do not consider one race to be superior to another, or one gender to be superior to another, but where we all stand in Christ together and under his Word together. That sounds admirable, doesn't it? But does it actually work? You are a person who is made up of a race (or more likely several) or races. Depending on how you were raised or what you experienced you have beliefs or tendencies. These beliefs are challenged by God's Word. Are you going to believe God's Word or are you going to hold on to your culturally influenced beliefs?

Crete had a history. Crete had a culture. Crete had a lifestyle. If you were a Crete there were things that you were expected to do. This was how life on Crete was lived. Crete had a reputation and while it was a place that was in desperate need of the gospel, it was not a place where, humanly speaking the gospel, was likely to take root and grow, and yet it did, but it was not without some major challenges, so, Paul left Titus there to help the churches become healthy outposts that pointed people to another world that was to come. Now, Paul is sending either Artemis or Tychicus to Crete with this letter in order to give Titus and the churches a bit more instruction. He is hopeful that Titus will be able to rejoin Paul at Nicopolis (Greece). This letter that Paul wrote to Titus was and is recognized as being canonical (that is it was received by the early church as being Scripture – and with good reason). We not only learn history from it, we learn more of what God expects out of his churches.

For almost a year now, we have been studying through 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and now Titus (Pastoral Epistles) because we need to be reminded of what the church is supposed to be, believe and be doing. Instead of comparing ourselves to other churches, to tradition or to the opinions of others, we need to be informed from the Bible about what a church is supposed to be, believe and be doing and this letter is not only helpful, but I want you to feel a sense of urgency because you feel the weight and authority of these truths for our church as we seek to be faithful to God's Word.

I. **It is all about the gospel.** (1-4)

The first four verses are one long sentence where Paul identifies himself as the author of this letter and identifies who this letter is written to. But, Paul cannot even say his own name without thinking about the gospel can he? And we know the reason for that. Saul was his Hebrew name and Paul was his Roman name. In his early days he was a Pharisee who probably had nothing but contempt for Gentiles, but after he came to faith in Christ, he began to understand (as he explained in the book of Ephesians) God's plan to unite all nations together under Christ. So, Saul, beginning in Acts 13 becomes known as Paul and in all of his letters he refers to himself as Paul. He is Paul because he is a Jew who not only wants Jews to come to faith in Christ; he wants Gentiles to come to Christ as well. Christ so radically changed his life that he now looks at all people very differently than he used to. So, as we read this letter, we have a chance to get inside of Paul's head. He writes his name to identify himself as the sender of the letter and his own name reminds him of who he is now and how his life is now all about the gospel.

A. This is who I (Paul) am

1) I am not my own

a. Slave of God

Paul uses the word (doulos) which means bondservant or bond-slave to describe the fact that his life is under the complete ownership and authority of God. This term was well known in his day since two-thirds of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves. There were various levels of slavery, but the bottom line was that you were under the authority of another, which was often not a good thing. But, to be under the ownership of God was a great thing! In his day, when a person became owned as a slave that person would be marked, often by a form of body piercing so that the mark was of a permanent nature. If you were owned, you were owned. For many again, it would be a form of embarrassment, unless of course, you loved your owner and your owner was exceedingly well respected in the community and was known to treat his slaves and servants with great respect and even payment, then of course you would be proud to display who owned you. Can you say that you are owned by God? Are you proud of that? Do you wear that happily? Why wouldn't you? Being owned by God or being a slave of God is another way to describe being a follower of Christ since it is Christ who, by means of his death on the cross paid the price for your purchase. When you think of it like that, it is stunning isn't it? I am not my own because God in Christ died for me in order to purchase my pardon because I couldn't and wouldn't pay for it myself. I am his because he bought me. He paid for me. That is overwhelming, isn't it? It was to Paul, who has a slave of God was given a job. Paul had no rights. He was under orders. He was responsible. He was charged with being an apostle (messenger sent on a mission of Jesus Christ).

b. Apostle of Jesus Christ

An apostle was a specific title for the 12 men who were used by God to found the church. As the organizers and leaders, these men occupied a temporary position of authority. As apostles they had charge over all the other churches and they could play that trump card of apostolic authority and give commands. That apostolic authority died with them. So, even here in this letter where Paul is giving instruction to Titus he is not designating Titus as an apostle, but is instructing Titus to represent Paul and speak on his behalf. But, the apostolic leadership that Paul had was for the sake of others. He lived and ministered in order to advance the faith of God's elect.

2) I live for the sake of others

i. The faith of God's elect

God's elect is a term that describes those who have become followers of Christ. It is a beautiful description of believers. Now, if you have been a follower of Christ for any length of time, you will probably run into people who say things like, "I don't believe in

the doctrine of election.” I honestly am saddened for people who think like that. Those who do not believe in the doctrine of election either do not read their Bibles, do not believe their Bibles, have a puny and suspicious view of God, or have a heightened view of their own abilities and goodness.

This past week, we had the primary election. In this election, we, the people voted to put on the November ballot the people we want to represent us. The phrase, “God’s elect” means that in the ultimate sense it is God who chose us to be his own. We loved him because he first loved us. We believe on him because he gave us the faith to believe. So, when Paul says that he lives and works for the sake of the faith of God’s elect he is speaking about spreading the gospel. He knows that God has people all over the place that he has chosen to come to faith in Christ and we are the instruments that God has ordained to share the gospel with them. And the good news of Christ is truth that people have to know and if people actually know it and believe it, it will produce godliness in their lives and this godliness is motivated by hope of eternal life, but this is not hope in the sense of a wish, it is a confident assurance that you can bank your life on. This hope of eternal life to every person who trusts in Christ alone as savior is the result of a plan that God established for our salvation and he has promised eternal life to every person who believes and since God cannot and will not lie, we can rest with absolute certainty on this.

So, Paul recognizes that his calling to preach the gospel to people who have never heard is part of the evidence of God’s unbreakable plan to save people. God manifests, that is, God displays the gospel to people through preaching and he commands certain people to preach because he has ordained that through the preaching of the gospel people will come to faith in Christ.

So, Paul is looking back over his life and he realizes that his calling to preach the gospel was so much greater than just God hijacking his life and changing his heart and making him a follower of Christ. God had selected Paul to be his instrument to spread the gospel to people that he had elected from before the foundation of the earth. Do you see what Paul is saying? His own life is so much bigger than he could have ever imagined and that really is what I want you to grasp from this introduction. It is not only true of Paul and Titus, this is true of you and me and this church. There is so much more going on in our lives and in our life together as a community of believers than we tend to think about. (more on that in a minute) The letter is written to Titus.

B. This is who you (Titus) are

He calls Titus, “my true child in a common faith.”

1) My true child in a common faith

What a great way to describe their relationship. Paul was the one who shared the gospel with Titus, so in that sense Titus was his son or as he called him, “my true child.” But, when you come to faith in Christ, you now belong to a family, a body, a flock, an army,

and a building, where each part has equal status and equal value. What we have together is a common faith. So, Paul can call himself an apostle (which he was) and call Titus his child in the faith and yet speak of the fact that they both enjoyed a common faith. They had the gospel in common and the gospel made them brothers. And as recipients of a common faith, Paul can pray for Titus that he would know and experience the grace and peace that is his from God the Father that is mediated to us through Christ Jesus our Savior. Again, the point is glorious! God the Father is full of grace and peace, but how can God express that grace and peace to us? How can God, who is perfectly just and infinitely holy and righteous express grace and peace to us without violating his righteousness? Simply put, how can God forgive sin without excusing sin? If God forgives sin, that means that God is treating sin as if it is not all that serious, unless God has an ethical basis on which to be able to forgive sin. God is able to forgive sin because Christ paid the price for our forgiveness when Christ died on the cross in our place. When Christ died on the cross, he absorbed the wrath that was meant for me. He took the punishment that I deserved. In my place he stood condemned. He sealed my pardon with his blood. The death of Christ satisfied the justice of God, and with the justice of God being satisfied the grace of God is now free to be unleashed on us. The only way that God can be gracious to us is through Christ, but because of Christ, God is gracious. This blessing that Paul invokes on Titus is a prayer that Titus would be reminded of the grace that has been extended to him through Christ and the peace that he now enjoys with God as a result. The gospel motivated Paul to preach it and organize those who believed it into churches. Now, Titus is left on the island of Crete to help these churches get established in a healthy manner. What we are going to see again is how God has designed for the leadership of the church to function in a way that puts the gospel on display, since the gospel is the very heart of ministry and message. The church will be about the gospel if her people are.

II. Good leaders are essential. (5-9)

Now, beginning in v.5 Paul starts to give specifics to Titus about how these local churches in Crete are to function. But, what he just said in the opening is not disconnected from what he says about the churches; in fact we need to see how connected they really are. So, here is the flow of thought. Paul's life and ministry was ordained and directed by God because from eternity past, God had a plan to have a people who would love him, enjoy him, worship him, follow him and live as one people from every tribe, language and nation. This was God's plan all along and God, who cannot lie promised that he was going to bring this about. Paul's selection as an apostle was part of God's plan. The planting and cultivation of these churches in Crete was part of his plan. The planting, cultivating and ongoing life of this church is part of his plan. God's eternal plan gives meaning, weight and significance to what we are doing when we gather together.

Part of our reason for existence is for the education of angels (1 Corinthians 11.10; 1 Timothy 5.21, Hebrews 13.2; 1 Peter 1.12). If, according to 1 Peter 1.12, the OT prophets were not serving themselves, but were in fact serving us, then it only stands to reason that our lives are not ultimately about serving ourselves but serving others. In fact, my own personal opinion is that this universe, this earth and our lives are really an incredible lab

where angels see the character of God and learn about the character of God and it is put on display in the laboratory of human history, which fuels their worship and amazement for God. They see the holiness of God (Isaiah 6) and as sinless beings are able to see it with a clarity and purity that we do not and they are overwhelmed and night and day they never stop worshipping God. At the same time, the angels that know of God's holiness and righteousness see his grace towards us and are also amazed. I think they are way more amazed than we are. So, when we gather together to "worship God" and we are bored, distracted, tired, disengaged, half-hearted, cynical, critical or flippant, I am convinced that they are a stunned and even perhaps a bit fearful and concerned for us because we are acting as if we have no idea what is really going on.

So, the church is not this little take-it-or-leave-it organization that is run by some spiritual types who seem to take this stuff a little too seriously as times. The true church is not man's idea and is not man's to format, organize or operate as he sees fit. God has instructions for the church and part of those instructions have to do with how the church is supposed to be led.

What is so interesting about this issue (church polity and leadership) is how it brings to the surface other issues. I do not have time to deal with all of that this morning, but it sure would be fun. But, I will say this. When we look at how the church is supposed to be organized and led, we should start with the Bible and we should seek to look at everything the Bible says about this topic and then develop a model of governance that seeks to harmonize all of those things. From this text then, there are four obvious points.

A. God calls for each local church to have elders.

The appointment of elders by Titus (on behalf of Paul) was consistent with what Paul and Barnabas did from the very beginning of their church planting missions trip in Acts 14. As an apostle, Paul could appoint elders in order to get things going, but from that point on, it would be up to the congregation to take it from there. But, the pattern is consistent. Each church is to have a plurality of elders.

One of the benefits of a plurality of elders is to protect the church from being run by a dictator who runs everything like his little kingdom. However, while that may be a benefit, I do not think that is primary reason for it. I think that every time God establishes leadership in the course of human history it is for the purpose of putting his leadership on display. I think that the bi-unity relationship of a husband and wife in marriage is an example of the tri-unity relationship of God. I believe that the leadership of the prophets and the priests and the kings of the OT all pointed to Christ who combined those three positions into his one person. I believe that the plurality of elders is to be for the church both a reflection of the Trinity to the church (unity in plurality) and is to be an example for marriage. But, the bottom line is this. The local church is not owned by one person. It is not run by one person. It is not ruled by one person. The local church is to function under the oversight of a plurality of elders.

B. Elders are leaders. (7)

Notice verse 7 because I think you will find this interesting. Paul uses the word “overseer” as another title for an elder. The word that is translated overseer is actually the word, episkopos. What does that sound like? That is where the Episcopalian denomination gets its name from. By the way, the word that is translated elder is the word presbuteros. What does that sound like? That is where the Presbyterian denomination gets its name from. The history of church denominations is pretty interesting and I am going to be teaching an elective this fall on Wednesday nights that will explore some of that as I teach on the Theology of the Reformers in keeping with the 500th anniversary of the Reformation that we are celebrating in the month of October. Now, obviously, there is a lot I could say about that, but I do not have the time. What I do want you to see is that an overseer is the same thing as an elder. This is another example of how the title of pastor, elder, bishop all refer to the same position. Please understand this. A bishop is the same thing as a pastor. A pastor is the same thing as an elder. Being on the payroll of the church does not give a person more authority. In the Bible there is no such thing as a bishop who is over an area of churches. In the Bible there is no such thing as a council of elders who rule over a group of churches. In the NT, the final court of appeals is the membership of that local church. The most important decisions that a church can ever face are determined by the members of the church (Matthew 18.15-20). Therefore, the primary job of the elders is to exercise their leadership by instructing the members of the church and to help them look more and more like Jesus.

Now, this ought to be a no-brainer, but it really needs to be said. Elders are to provide leadership to the congregation. Their job as shepherds is not to follow the sheep over the cliff, but to lead the sheep into green pastures by still waters. That is, the elders are to care for the flock and tend to her needs. This implies not only that they lead, but that the church follows their lead. This is hard for us because we have an innate distrust of anyone in leadership, including God. Can elders leverage their position of authority for selfish reasons? Sure, they can try and some may do it, but if the congregation is serious about only putting biblically qualified men into the position of elders, they will mitigate this drastically. Elders who lead and who lead well are an enormous gift of God to a local church. Elders who lead well recognize that they are stewards.

C. Elders are stewards. (7)

A steward is one who acts on behalf of the owner. The owner of the church is God. The head of the church is Christ. The ownership and headship of the church is mediated through the elders who are to be to the congregation a taste of God and Christ. As stewards, the elders are accountable to God. Hebrews 13.17 says, “*Obey your leaders (referring to the elders) and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*”

D. Elders have to be qualified. (6-9)

They have to be men. They have to meet the qualifications of these verses and the church should never vote any man into the office of an elder who is not qualified, no matter how

nice he is, how involved he has been, how long he has been a member, how much money he may have, whether or not he goes on vacations with other elders and their kids play together. This is not a good ole boys club. The church is not ours to do with as we want. There is so much more going on than we can imagine. The church is ground zero in the cosmic war over the universe. And that war is made visible by attacks from without and within the church. So, the elders have to be qualified in order to protect the church from theological heresy, and from inconsistent living. They have to watch over their own belief and behavior so that they can oversee the same thing for the members.

A local church whose members are intoxicated and organized by the gospel is an awesome weapon in the hand of God. She is so powerful, that even the gates of hell itself cannot stand against her.