

Series: Open Door

Sunday, May 21

Titus Sermon: #1: Finding Your Way

Scripture: Titus 1:10-16

Text: 2 Corinthians 7:6 “But God cheers up people in need, and that is what he did when he sent Titus to us.”

Theme: Exploring how we live on the other side of the open door.

We cannot compartmentalize our lives into doors. Jesus is not a part of our lives, but life itself!

We will spend a few weeks with the book of Titus to help us unpack the link between gospel belief and gospel behavior. He helps us reorient the gospel to the center of our lives.

The Book of Titus helps lay out how to live according to God’s promises. The book is full of rules, but the motivation for these rules is not legalism. It’s the incarnation of the Son of God for redemption! Christianity is not merely rules to be followed, but instead, joy to be found.

Blurb: How many doors are there in your life? Is your life a hallway of doors, each leading to a room that is a different part of our lives? Do you feel like you’re trying to juggle so many different parts, all the different compartments, all the different persons you are? This Sunday we begin our reading of the Book of Titus, written to help Jesus-followers see how to live on the other side of God’s open door. God intends for us to live a unified, focused, centered lives. Come hear how to get your life together, aligning our behaviors with our beliefs. Time to live on the other side of the door!

Sermon Intro Video

PP#1: The Open Door

Finding Your Way

“But God cheers up people in need, and that is what he did when he sent Titus to us.” -2 Corinthians 7:6

Our spring series has used the image of how God places before us open doors. We’ve talked about what holds us back from going through God’s open doors. We’ve talked about what it takes to go through them, even dance through them. *Now* I want to start taking a closer look at how to live on the other side of the door. When we commit to follow God’s leading, when we choose to follow God’s way of life, what does that look like? Not just for a life decision in front of us, but how do we live continuously on the other side of the door?

So, today, we’re going to start looking at an obscure book in the New Testament. Anyone here remember hearing a sermon on the book of Titus? In all honesty, I have to admit I have never preached on Titus! I wanted to talk about how we can live following Jesus, so I went to the New Testament for scriptural guidance. I was drawn to Paul’s letters, for Paul constantly talks about how to live as a Jesus-follower. As I was flipping through Paul’s letters, I came across Titus. Now, like I said, I’ve never preached on Titus, so I have never dug in there very deeply. I knew it was Paul talking to Christians on how to live for God. So I read it again. And as I began to see how in Titus, Paul intentionally connects gospel belief with gospel behavior, showing the path to spiritual maturity, I knew this was where we needed to go...it was my open door! So, today we’re starting the book of Titus, and the message is, “Finding Your Way.” 2 Corinthians 7:6 “But God cheers up people in need, and that is what he did when he sent Titus to us.”

PP#2: *A hallway with lots of doors.*

We walk through the door, choosing to follow Jesus in our lives. We accept His gift of salvation won for us on the cross and in His resurrection. His forgiveness, His victory over death, is applied to our lives. We live new lives. And so Christians sometime say, “Jesus is the most important part of my life.”

You know, it sounds pretty good to say that, but that phrase is starting to bother me a bit...especially after I’ve been reading Titus. “Jesus is the most important *part* of my life.” Can you hear it, too? It actually seems to suggest that Jesus is just a *part* of my life. You know, sometimes that’s how we think about it. I have a part of my life in which I’m trying to follow Jesus. Maybe on Sunday mornings. Maybe when I pray before I eat. Maybe when I click on the pass it forward email about how America is a nation under God. But then there are parts of my life I don’t want Jesus around. When I’m spending way too much money on myself for selfish reasons. When I’m angry at that coworker who is just so annoying! When I have my evening all planned out just the way I want it to go, with no room for additions or changes.

Christians can do this. We can become good at compartmentalizing our lives. It’s like a hallway with all kinds of rooms. We have a room for our work life, one for our public life, one for our leisure time, one for how we are a parent, or a spouse, or out with the guys. And Jesus may be the most important part, and we invite Him behind certain doors, but certainly not others.

PP#3: *Two circles: 1) A pie chart w/different color wedges, and 2) A wheel w/a hub and spokes.*

Although it’s *convenient*, it’s problematic to see our lives like a pie chart. The biggest part is Jesus!? No. When we choose Jesus, we take Him as the very center of our lives, of who we are, of everything we are. It’s less like a pie chart, and more like a wheel, where Jesus is at the very center, Jesus is the hub, and everything else in our lives are spokes that emanate out from Him at the center of us. When we follow Jesus, then He influences *everything* in my life: my work, my play, my marriage, my parenting, my hobbies, my relationships, my time, my money, and so on.

Taking Jesus is kind of like getting married. That commitment changes everything! Everything is now shared. It realigns all the parts of my life. We can’t get married and then just keep living like single people! Living for God means sharing every part of our lives with Jesus!

And that’s where we come to Titus. As you’ll see in a bit, the book of Titus isn’t the easiest book to read. But I’ve found that in writing Titus, Paul tackles the temptation to compartmentalize our faith. He unpacks the consistent link between Gospel belief and Gospel behavior, reorienting our relationship with Jesus to the center, impacting every aspect of our lives.

PP#4: *Image of Titus, perhaps with Paul*

All right. A little background. Paul was not one of Jesus’ earliest followers. In fact, it wasn’t until after Jesus had been crucified, raised from the dead, and had ascended back to heaven that Paul first meets Jesus. Paul was a very devout Jew who was trying to uproot the new sect that claimed Jesus was the Savior. Then, on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus, Jesus appears to Paul in a flash of light, and calls him to stop persecuting Christians, and instead go preach and teach and make more of them! Paul is converted in a flash...pun intended!

So after training with the apostles and the other original followers of Jesus, Paul sets out on three different missionary journeys through present day Turkey and Greece. Somewhere along the

first journey, he connects with a man named Titus, and Titus gives his life to Jesus. Not only that, Titus ends up going with Paul and serving with Paul from then on. He becomes one of Paul's main missionary leaders among the churches that Paul founds.

After his first journey out into the Gentile world, Paul comes back to the Christian Jews in Jerusalem, and reports how the Lord has shown up in dramatic ways among the Gentiles, and that Christians were converted and churches founded. The leaders in Jerusalem are confused. After all, Jesus was a Jew, all the original disciples were Jews, and they were all *still* Jews. What is this talk about people following Jesus without following the Jewish laws and customs?

PP#5: Galatians 2:1-10

"...I went to Jerusalem with Barnabas. I also took along Titus....and I explained the good news that I had been preaching to the Gentiles...Titus went to Jerusalem with me. He was a Greek, but still he wasn't forced to be circumcised...James, Peter, and John realized that God had given me the message about His undeserved kindness. And these men are supposed to be the backbone of the church. They even gave Barnabas and me a friendly handshake. This was to show that we would work with Gentiles and that they would work with Jews."

In the middle of the discussion, Paul brings out Titus. Titus was a Gentile who was not following any of the Jewish ritual laws. Yet, he was a fervent Jesus-follower. His example helped the Christian leaders realize that in order to follow Jesus, you didn't have to follow the Jewish rituals. And so, as recorded in Acts 15, a monumental decision was made to not require Christians to follow Jewish rituals. And that's why to this day we don't follow the Jewish rituals. Thanks, Titus!

PP#6: 2 Corinthians 8:16-24

"I am grateful that God made Titus care as much about you as we do. When we begged Titus to visit you, he said he would. He wanted to because he cared so much for you.... We are also sending someone else with Titus and the other follower.... Titus is my partner, who works with me to serve you.... Treat them in such a way that the churches will see your love and will know why we bragged about you."

Well, on their second missionary journey, Paul runs into trouble at the church he started in Corinth, Greece. After he leaves, he sends Titus back—twice—with letters from Paul, and with the task of setting things aright. Titus, it seems, was held in high regard, and had great skills not only as a missionary, but also as a mediator, reconciler, and as a people person. Notice Paul's strategy: when he wrote letters to the churches, he sends someone along with them to help settle and grow the church. We learn of Paul's team: Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, Silas, John Mark, Luke, and so on. Paul always did ministry *in person*, even when Paul couldn't be there *himself*.

Paul's team had been collecting offerings to help the persecuted Christians in Jerusalem. Paul then entrusts Titus to carry those all the way back to Jerusalem. It seems Titus was someone Paul trusted very much.

PP#7: *Map of Paul's missionary journey, close up showing at least Corinth, Ephesus and Crete*

At some point, Paul, Timothy and Titus leave Ephesus and go over to Crete, an island between Turkey and Greece. After starting churches there, Paul and Timothy head back to Ephesus.

They leave Titus on Crete to help the churches there get organized and grow.

We're not sure how long Titus was on Crete, or if he left and went back, but about 10 years later, shortly before Paul is martyred, Paul sends Titus a letter. This is the letter that is in our Bibles as Titus. It's one of the last biblical letters Paul writes, perhaps that and then 2 Timothy, and probably from prison in Rome. We're talking about 35 years after Jesus' death and resurrection.

PP#8: Outline of the Epistle (Letter) to Titus

From: Paul, probably from prison in Rome

Date: Around 65 A.D.

To: Titus on Crete

1:1-4 Greeting

1:5-16 Instructions to Titus - Appoint leaders and refute false teachers

2-3 Instructions to the Church of Crete:

2:1-15 - Get rightly organized

3:1-11 - Be lights and witnesses to others

3:12-15 Closing

Titus is on Crete, being the pastor of the various churches there. Paul, still concerned about the churches he founded, hears about some of their struggles, and sends a letter to his dear friend Titus.

We'll look at each chapter a bit more closely over the next three Sundays, but today let's take a quick look at the beginning of the letter.

Evidently some Jewish folks had come and taught the people in Crete that Christians needed to follow the Jewish ritual laws. Perhaps they said that Jesus never taught His followers to stop following the Jewish ceremonial laws. Therefore, all Christians should follow them.

Now, remember, Paul and the apostles tackled that one about 15 years earlier back in Jerusalem. Titus had helped them see that all you need to follow Jesus is faith in Him. But Paul was not around, and these false teachers started stirring up trouble for Titus.

So Paul writes Titus, telling him to restore order, through preaching the truth and backing it up with true living. Right understanding of Jesus, and right living. Belief and behavior. Keep them connected. That's how you live as Christians. That's how you resist falling prey to false teaching.

PP#9: Titus 1:1-4

1 From Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ.

I encourage God's own people to have more faith and to understand the truth about religion.

2 Then they will have the hope of eternal life that God promised long ago. And God never tells a lie! 3 So, at the proper time, God our Savior gave this message and told me to announce what He had said.

4 Titus, because of our faith, you are like a son to me. I pray that God our Father and Christ Jesus our Savior will be kind to you and will bless you with peace!

So right off the bat, Paul begins by establishing the right understanding of Jesus, the truth. Verse 1. "From Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ."

Paul was an apostle, commissioned that day when Jesus appeared to him in that flash of light. So, he is sent by Jesus Himself. Can the other teachers claim that?

"I encourage God's own people to have more faith and to understand the truth about

religion.” Grow in your faith! Believe! Don’t be so quick to follow other teachings. Understand the truth! Verse 2, “Then they will have the hope of eternal life that God promised long ago. And God never tells a lie!” Remember, we’re talking about eternal life here. This is no little issue. When you believe rightly, you then have hope, as God has always promised...God doesn’t try to deceive!

Verse 3, “So, at the proper time, God our Savior gave this message and told me to announce what He had said.” What I taught you, I didn’t make up. It came from God Himself. And God told me to tell it to you. The other people can’t say this. Don’t listen to them. But now listen to Titus. He’s the guy telling you what I told you. Verse 4, “Titus, because of our faith, you are like a son to me. I pray that God our Father and Christ Jesus our Savior will be kind to you and will bless you with peace!” Paul and Titus bring the same message. How validated Titus must have felt!

PP#10: Finding Your Way

1. God’s plan requires participation

How do you live as a Jesus-follower? What does it look like to live on the other side of God’s door? Even in these few opening lines, Paul describes three parts of living in a way that your right beliefs are evidenced in right behaviors.

God’s *promised plan* for your life involves *participation*. Paul is God’s *servant*, actively serving God, not just keeping a list of rules from God. He is a witness for Jesus, sent by Jesus. God makes His plan known to the world by having His people tell other people. The message of salvation in Jesus is passed along from person to person. Someone told you. That’s how you found out. God’s plan to spread this good news over all the earth requires the *participation* of God’s people.

No, you can’t change people, you can’t make them different. But you don’t have to! God can, and it is God who does. All you need to do is help them hear about the God who can bring change, real change. Like Paul, we *encourage* people, we explain to people.

Living on the other side of the door means you participate in God’s plan. You have a role. You have to tell people! God will do the work. We participate by sharing.

PP#11: Finding Your Way

1. God’s plan requires participation

2. God’s plan gives grace

God’s plan is a plan to give grace. We are not called to follow a bunch of rules. Jesus has done the work. God, in stead, comes to us to give us gifts. At the right time, God gave Jesus. And God gave the Holy Spirit to each of us. We have God’s Spirit within us! God gives each of us open doors, new potential, new futures. God has promised this plan long ago. It’s a plan giving hope, a plan giving life that does not end. Think about that! What a gracious God! God gives life that never ends. Free...Jesus already secured it, paid the price. What a generous God!

Paul passes along that grace to Titus. God’s people walk in God’s kindness and blessing!

Living on the other side of the open door is a life of grace. It’s walking following Jesus, but it is walking in the grace and kindness that God showers down upon us constantly. You are blessed by God’s generosity! You are FULL of hope. You’re living a life of grace when you’re following Jesus!

PP#12: Finding Your Way

1. God's plan requires participation
2. God's plan gives grace
3. God's plan produces peace

One more. God's plan produces peace. I can just imagine the Jews who came to Crete and told everyone that they had to become Jews like they were in order to be saved, in order to follow Jesus. They were Jews. But Titus was not. I love what Paul does here. It's almost as if Paul is envisioning that day in Jerusalem, when they stood together before the apostles. It was not their Jewish rituals that bound them together, and to Jesus, it was their faith. "Titus, because of our faith, you are like a son to me." It is their common faith in Jesus that united them, and made them *family*! How that must have fortified Titus! Paul says, "You, a Greek, a Gentile, you are a son to me! God is my Father and your Father. Jesus is my savior and your savior. And I pray He blesses you with peace!"

The restoration with God produces a restoration of us with others. The vertical relationship with God also restores our horizontal relationships with others. Following Jesus affects all of our lives, especially our relationships!

We can have peace...peace with God, peace within ourselves, and peace with others. God gives it as a gift, freely, readily, to all of us.

PP#13: *Image of Titus framed by an open door.*

Living on the other side of the door means living with Jesus as our center. He affects everything about us. We are woven into God's plan, and we participate by sharing with others how amazing our God is. We are given grace, each step along the way, showered upon constantly. And we have the peace which transcends every part of our lives, every connection we have.

"I pray that God our Father and Christ Jesus our Savior will be kind to you and will bless you with peace!" Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR MAY 22, 2016

Spring Series: “The Open Door”

Sermon: “Finding Your Way”

Scripture: Titus 1:1-4

Opening prayer

Introductions: Share about someone you worked closely with and who was a blessing to you!

Background: Skim Titus 1-3.

Read: Titus 1:1-4

1. Verse 1. Who wrote this letter? What do you know about him?
2. Paul says he encourages people to have more faith. How has that happened with you? How have you been encouraged to grow in your faith?
3. What is the truth about religion that Paul mentions here, do you think?
4. Verse 2. How can Paul claim that God had promised eternal life long ago?
5. Why would Paul say that God never tells a lie?
6. Verse 3. What was the proper time that God told Paul to go share the message of salvation to others. Hint: Look at Acts 9.
7. Explain God’s plan for the people of the earth to learn about Jesus. Why did it involve Paul?
8. Does it involve you? If you, how?
9. Verse 4. How is it that Paul, a Jew, can claim Titus, a Greek/Gentile as a son?
10. What are some ways you can use this prayer (Verse 4) to pray for others you know. Commit to praying for specific people in the week ahead.
11. Application: What will you take away from this passage? How will you live it out?