

TITUS 3:1-8

GOD SAVES

Before I was a Christian, I showed up at a church because I was searching for something spiritual in my life. After the service was over someone asked me how I heard about the church. “I just drove by and wanted to visit, I replied.” “You didn’t just drive by” someone said, “God brought you here.” Now that statement really irritated me because I felt like it was overly religious and I felt like it gave God the credit for something I did. As far as I was concerned God had nothing to do with my visit that Sunday morning. It was on me!

About a year later, I accepted Jesus Christ into my life because I finally felt the time was right for me to do it. That experience totally affected my theology and I would tell folks who were unbelievers that you can’t feel pressured by people to accept Christ—you have to wait until the time comes where you feel ready. I later realized, what I was describing was salvation from my perspective—the human one. From the human perspective God was always there and I finally came to the point where I accepted Him.

But have you ever stopped to think about your salvation from God’s perspective? What was God’s role in all this? There are passages in the Bible that make it very clear that while we like to merit the credit for choosing God—He actually made our choosing possible. It’s called regeneration. You see, there was a time Kene Panas had no desire to follow God—but something changed in my heart where I wanted to choose Him. Something happened in my heart where I developed a new kind of affection, a new kind of devotion, a new kind of love for Christ. So what happened to warrant this type of change? God had been at work on me behind the scenes. The thing that strikes me throughout the book of Titus is that Paul wants his understudy to understand that God is the hero and that we owe our salvation to Him—which means our lives should humbly reflect this reality by how we live and serve others. But in order to experience this humility—we have to study what the Scriptures teach about God’s role in salvation. This passage we will explore today (Titus 3:1-8) is loaded with theology and will answer some on how God works behind the scenes. It will answer the *what, why, and how* God leads us to Him.

I want to begin with *the what*. Verse 5 begins by telling us about “the what.” It simply says God saved us. **4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us.** The term is used here in the sense of a rescue mission. We were prisoners of war and we needed to be saved. How did he save us? The text says that God made an appearance. He came to our rescue from heaven. Verse 6 shows us that God our Savior is the same person as Jesus our Savior. This is a clear reference where God is referred to as Jesus. We have heard this before but it is still worth pondering: Jesus, our Savior is none other God in the flesh. God appeared in the form of a man. He came down to from heaven to die in our place and rescue us. There are some people who believe that all religions lead to God. But here’s the problem. Jesus *was* and *still is* God. Islam would vehemently deny Mohammed was God. Buddhists would never suggest that Buddha was God. Christianity is the only religion that has the audacity to suggest that its messenger, Jesus of Nazareth was not just a man or a lesser deity like Gnosticism would say. No, Paul says God our Savior is none other than our Savior Jesus. God made an appearance on earth to rescue us because we needed saving. Most religions are aware that Jesus claims to be God and they without hesitation deny this because if it is true it changes everything. If Jesus is God then...there is no other way because God came down from heaven and told us so. That separates Him from the so-called gods. He saved us. That is “the what” of our salvation.

Now the question is *why*! Why did God come down from heaven to save us? Paul answers that question in verses 4 and 5. **4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.**

The first reason God saved us is because of His goodness. By His very nature God is good. But not just good. Anyone can be good from time to time. The term Goodness implies that He is by nature good all of the time. There is not a time when He is bad. Some might argue this attribute of God. What about the natural disasters like the cyclone in Burma or the earthquake in China? Innocent people lost their lives. If God is good why did He allow those catastrophes to happen? Or

what about the twin towers in New York or the train explosions in Spain? What about the little girls who are kidnapped, raped, and killed? Surely God can't be good all the time.

The bad things in life are not because God is not good it is because this world is contaminated by sin and is bad. Despite this Ebola type of contamination He shows his goodness—by saving us from the consequences of sin, that most serious being death. If God were to exercise complete justice—He would every right to destroy us and the world we live in because we don't seek Him when left to ourselves. But He doesn't destroy us because of His goodness. He provides sunshine, harvests, rainfall, children, nature, and a chance to make your life profitable. There are many people who reject God but he still bestows them with goodness.

The second reason Paul mentions why God saved us is also listed in verse 4. He rescued us because of His loving kindness. The Greek word for this expression is *Philanthropos*. It is where we get the word philanthropy from. If you break the word down *philo* means love. *Antropos* means humanity. Philanthropos means to be a lover of humanity. God rescued us because He is a lover of people. You might argue, "How could God be a lover of people if He sent His son to die on our behalf?" That is not loving His Son. If you truly love someone you will be willing to die for them. I would be willing to die for my wife and Korban if I knew my death would preserve their lives. I am a lover of my wife and son. God is a lover of humanity and he shows His love by sacrificing His son for you and I. But here is the difference. My wife and son have shown that they love me. They have demonstrated that through their actions they love me. However, God is a lover of people despite our actions. Look what happens when we read the verse in its context. **But when His goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done to us in righteousness, but because of His mercy.**

What Paul is saying is that God didn't save you because you loved Him or proved yourself worthy. He didn't save you because you were a good person. He saved because He has mercy on you. You have mercy on people who you feel sorry for regardless if they are right or wrong. One of the chief problems with me is that I like to take the credit. At home there are times where I will do the dishes or clean the house. If Machele doesn't comment on those things I will mention to her that I wanted to help her out by doing the dishes or cleaning the house. I want her to say thanks for doing that—you did a good job. I want the credit and for her to affirm me. Kene Panas is wired in a way were he wants his good works to be noticed. I don't like it when she doesn't notice.

It is the same for us when it comes to salvation. We want to take the credit. "You know there was a point in my life where I wasn't ready. But when I was ready, I chose Jesus." Other people say "God knew my heart was right—that is why He saved me." Paul is saying here that God didn't save because of your acts of righteousness—He saved you because of His mercy! There are some powerful passages that humble us when it comes to God's mercy. We are not as good as we think.

Romans 9:10-16

And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, **11** though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— **12** she was told, "The older will serve the younger." **13** As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! **15** For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

Ephesians 2: 4-5

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved

You have to understand. I have to understand. If we have accepted Jesus in our lives—it is not anything we can take credit for. I have no right to boast. I was dead in my trespasses. I was as unresponsive to God as a corpse. But God

being rich—and the emphasis is on Him being rich in mercy—made me alive!. He did it. He will have mercy on whom He chooses to have mercy. That is humbling. Okay, we answered the “what” when it comes to salvation. God saved us when He appeared on earth. Why did he do it? He did it because of his goodness. His loving-kindness, and because of His mercy for us. Now I want to answer the question of *how*. How did God save us? The answer is in the latter half of verse 5. **by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,**

Regeneration is best understood as meaning new birth. Many have pondered the question of what came first; regeneration or belief. In other words, do I believe in God first—then God regenerates my heart or does God first regenerate the heart which leads to belief. Some equate this with the parable of the chicken or the egg. I use to—but I don’t anymore. Scripture will not allow me to. God has to get the glory not Kene! Here is a passage from the lips of Jesus. He is addressing a man named Nicodemus, an expert in the Jewish religion

John 3:3-5

Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Here Jesus is describing regeneration. Regeneration means to be born again. So how can a man be born again? Jesus responds by saying, “he can’t, unless he is born of water and the spirit.” It is the Spirit who awakens us. He makes us receptive to God. Without the Spirit regenerating us—we are still dead in our trespasses. Think about it this way. When you pray for someone to get saved you ask, “Lord open their heart so they can be receptive.” You are asking God to regenerate them. If God doesn’t open their heart—they will never accept Him.

Notice also that Jesus uses the term born of water and the Spirit and Paul seems to echo this thought and says God saves us through the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Spirit. The confusing issue here is understanding what Jesus means by water and Paul means by washing because both seem essential. Some use this verse to mean baptismal regeneration which simply means baptism is a requirement for your salvation. I don’t think Paul is trying to communicate that here. That would mean that a human work like baptism would be necessary for you to be saved. I think a more accurate way is to study what God told Ezekiel—who was under the Old Covenant—what would happen to His people in the New Covenant. Notice how water is used here.

Ezekiel 36:26-27

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Notice that water has to do with cleansing. Jesus says a man has to be born of water and the Spirit. Paul says regeneration consists of the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Spirit. Both elements are necessary for a person to believe. They must be washed or cleansed of sin and they must be renewed by the Holy Spirit. That’s what happens when one is regenerated by God’s Spirit. They are washed clean by the Spirit—who now lives inside of them. In the Ezekiel passage one more thing is important. God does the initiating. He cleans them of uncleanness. He gives them a new heart. He removes the heart of stone. He gives them a new Spirit. He does all the saving because of His goodness; His love for humanity, His mercy. He is our Hero. Without Him there is no salvation. He saves us!

As I close, there is one more reason why God saved us that is mentioned in this passage. **4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**

The New Earth: God also saved you because He wanted you to be an heir to the hope of eternal life. Hope here is used in the sense of something that we expect to happen. Think about that, God saved you because He wanted you to be an heir of eternity. Ponder this: We will live in a restored earth where there are no traces of the curse. No more earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, no more thorns. Instead we inherit a world that is so perfect it is beyond your imagination.

The New Body: You will inherit a body that is far more beautiful than you ever imagined. No more health issues. No more cellulite battles. No more hair loss. No more addictions. No more medical prescriptions, no more doctors. In fact, you will be so healthy you will no longer need to sleep because your body won't need to recover. There will be light all the time. I often tease my wife at night by not turning off the lights. She insists I turn them off so she can go to sleep. I tell her come on beautiful, let's leave them on tonight because this is what it will be like in heaven. It never works but I try. She loves her sleep.

Relationships: There will be no more heartaches, or tragedies, or deaths. Everyone one will get a long and we will all maintain the best parts of our personality and eliminate the bad parts, like grumpiness. Men, will no longer burp or pass gas. Ladies that means no PMS. The Scriptures in Isaiah 65 even says the animals will get along. And the best part of it is that we will worship the One True God and will be able to meet the men and women we read about in the Bible. Imagine the conversations. You won't need to pray to Jesus because he will be there. Lastly the one virtue that will remain for all eternity is love. Maybe you don't feel loved by others. Part of that is because we are so selfish that our love is fleeting and conditional. But in heaven not only will you feel loved by all—but you will also love others. You won't be ashamed of your past or your appearance, or your intelligence. You will be able to open up to all people without being afraid to share. It is almost hard to imagine. Perfect relationships with others—and a perfect relationship with God. How could you not worship God everyday when you understand where you came from? You would realize you went from desolation to glory and from poverty to royalty. That is what it means to be an heir.

Reunions with God's People: All this because of God's goodness, His loving-kindness, and His mercy. You will enjoy the vacation you always imagined for an eternity. And you will enjoy it all with the people who you have lost to death who were Christians. Maybe you're thinking that is just too good to be true. You're right it is in this life. Maybe you don't think you could handle all that goodness because you're used to a life that is hard. Don't be afraid. You will adapt nicely to the perfection. In conclusion of all that God has done for you based on nothing you have done through your own righteousness is it too much to ask to live the rest of your life here in obedience to God?

You see, wrapped around this nugget about God's salvation are what he expects from us today until we become heirs.

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, 2 to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. 3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. Verse 8 reads....

8 The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

In the end, when you understand that God saved you based on His own merit—you can see why the apostle wants us to reflect this grace in our lives. The good works and right attitude help others see the traces of what it will be in heaven. It is our duty to show people how God saved our lives because of His goodness, His loving kindness, and good works. May we understand that we are heirs to eternity because of God's grace and live lives that demonstrate our appreciation that when we were desperate and needed to be rescued—God saved us!