

THE BLESSED HOPE

Titus 2:11-14

January 1, 2023

We have just spent the Advent season revisiting the familiar stories of the birth of Christ from Matthew's and Luke's Gospel accounts. Christmas means Jesus the living Word of Life appeared and lived among us and as Paul writes to encourage a young pastor named Titus, ***“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, up-right, and godly lives in this present age”*** (Titus 2:11-12 - NIV). I also like the Passion Translation which I believe gives us a better understanding of these two verses, ***“God’s marvelous grace has manifested in person, bringing salvation for everyone. This same grace teaches us how to live each day as we turn our backs on ungodliness and indulgent lifestyles, and it equips us to live self-controlled, upright, godly lives in this present age.”***

Paul tells us here that grace is a person and grace is also our teacher, calling us and equipping us to live godly lives as His representatives in this present age. In this very specific time we are living in, and in the very specific place we are living – every believer represents Christ. It's not a coincidence that you are living in this time period and it's not a coincidence where you are currently living. Paul is telling Titus and telling us that we are part of God's plan to host His presence and bring Heaven down to this earth right where we are living, working, shopping, and worshipping in the year 2023. God trusts us with the great responsibility to represent Him well, because we may be the only Bible someone may read and be the only Jesus others will know!

What I want to focus on as we begin this new year is what we need to be focused on in the coming year as His representatives, His presence to those around us. Paul tells Pastor Titus in the next two verses what he is to keep telling his congregation that they're not to be asleep or idle but be about God's business as they wait for the second coming of Christ – who Paul describes as ***“THE BLESSED HOPE.” Titus 2:13-14, “while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good”*** (NIV). Let's also look at the NKJV – as we wait we are to be actively ***“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.” We are special people – God’s gift to those around us and to our communities!

In our Bibles we find that this section is broken up into four verses, but in the original Greek it is one continuous sentence, meaning it’s one thought or idea. Here’s the idea: *“God’s grace, in the person of Jesus Christ, came to this earth to not only bring us salvation, but to also teach us and equip us to put away our ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live holy righteous lives, awake to what is taking place around us, being eager and zealous in doing good works as His representatives (His special people) as we wait and look for His glorious return!*

The Greek word Paul uses here for “*the blessed hope*” is “*epiphaneia*,” from which we get the word **Epiphany**. We celebrate Christmas every year on December 25th as the first Epiphany – it was through the appearing of Christ as a baby, that this wonderful hope was brought to all the world. So, just as the blessed hope of Israel two thousand years ago was the coming of the Messiah, for believers today, the sure and blessed hope is the second Epiphany – when Jesus will return, this time not as a baby, but as a reigning King to judge the world and set up His everlasting kingdom. Grace has entered the world! Grace is our teacher, helper, and equipper in how to live godly lives as He lives within us! And then, Grace will return and establish His everlasting Kingdom here on this earth!

These four verses – **Titus 2:11-14** – demonstrate how God’s grace is constant, timeless, and enduring. **In the past:** While we were still sinners, grace appeared to mankind when Christ was born into this world and offered us the gift of salvation; however, because of free will, some accept grace and become a child of God, while others continue to reject grace and are not part of His family. **In the present:** When we accept the gift of salvation, we are set free from our sins and grace comes to live within us, teaching us how to say NO to ungodliness and worldly passions, teaching us how to live godly lives as strangers and foreigners in this present age, while longingly waiting in expectation for the second coming of Christ. And then, **in the future:** Grace will re-appear on this earth at the glorious return of Christ this time for all to see, believer and unbeliever alike, and even those that pierced Him, but at that time free-will will no longer exist. Every knee will be forced to bow before Him and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. Paul’s message to Titus, and for His church is this –

God's grace is unavoidable and inescapable – because Grace is a person called the Blessed Hope, who currently sits at the right hand of God and will return one day!

The key verse in this passage is **verse 13**, and I want us to make it personal, ***“I am looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.”*** Does that verse describe you? Are you anxious for Christ's return? Are you ready for Christ's return? If not, then what are you looking for and hoping for in 2023? And then, what about Christ's bride, His church, is the church waiting in anticipation and ready for the return of the Bridegroom? Currently Satan is waging an all out war against the church and every believer to compromise their faith and question the Word of God. Currently the church is divided. We see how every denomination is struggling to understand what position to take on the numerous social issues we are currently facing, how to respond in love, and how to be true to God's Word as our faith is being attacked. That struggle is causing division, but God is at work bringing unity. That's my prayer for 2023. God is refining His bride and the true church will be revealed!

I believe that because we read this wonderful invitation in the concluding chapter of the book of Revelation, ***“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life”*** (Revelation 22:17 NIV). This is the final invitation given in the Bible before the return of Christ. Let's also listen to the Passion Translation, ***“Come,’ says the Holy Spirit and the Bride in divine duet. Let everyone who hears this duet join them in saying, ‘Come.’ Let everyone gripped with spiritual thirst say, ‘Come.’ And let everyone who craves the gift of living water come and drink freely. ‘Come.’”*** I like where the Passion translation says that the Holy Spirit and the Bride of Christ (His church) are in complete unity, in this divine duet in worship, singing for Christ to return. The Holy Spirit and the true end-time church is filled by those that are spiritually thirsty in worshipping and praising God – compelling others to join this heavenly choir. The first part of the verse is an invitation by the Holy Spirit and the awakened church (the radiant bride that has made herself ready) for Christ to come back to this world and bring about His millennium Kingdom, His thousand year rule. Then the last part of the verse is an invitation for the world to come to Christ, or to come back to Christ if they have drifted away. This is the final plea in the Bible calling the lost to decide for Christ while the gift of salvation is still freely given, before time runs out and God's grace ends, and it's all tied to the unified worshipping church in the last days!

The Holy Spirit is longing for the return of Christ, and the bride of Christ, the true church, is longing to be reunited with the Bridegroom! These 2000 years of separation have been difficult! When you truly love someone, separation is difficult. Laurie and I started dating in August of 1971, just weeks before I was returning to the University of Guelph for my second year. At that time Laurie was working at the CIBC bank in Dresden, and it was a difficult year because of our miles of separation and social media back then was writing a letter, because a long distance phone call was expensive, and if you did call then you could only afford to speak for a few minutes on a student's budget. That's what I believe the Apostle John is writing about here in **Revelation 22:17**. We are to be like a bride who has been separated from her husband for a great many years and desperately longs to have him back home and close in her arms. And then, Jesus Himself also has a burning desire to come to claim His Bride, the spotless church that has made herself ready for her Bridegroom, but Jesus has to wait for His Father's timing, as He told His disciples that He doesn't even know the day or the hour of His return!

As we continue to wait in 2023, Paul in his letter to Titus tells us that we are to not lose the anticipation of His return, His glorious coming; however, when the Spirit says "*Come,*" it will first involve shaking, like being shaken awakened from a deep sleep or like the shaking of a building during an earthquake. In the last few years, we have been shaken by COVID, learning new ways to gather in worship and to proclaim the Gospel message, and now higher costs, higher inflation and higher interest rates are creating added stress in feeding our families and filling our cars with fuel, plus the war in Ukraine and unrest in many areas of the world doesn't help. We are definitely living in uncertain times in which everything that can be shaken is being shaken!

The Book of Exodus tells us about Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. They were heading to the Promised Land, but before Moses could lead them to their destination, he needed to lead them to the mountain of God, Mt Sinai, to receive the Ten Commandments. They needed to receive God's rules for holy living, because the land that they would be entering was similar to Egypt, a land filled with all kinds of temptations to worship foreign gods. So, God not only had to get His people out of Egypt but also had to get Egypt out of His people! When God descended the mountain, the mountain shook and bellowed with fire and smoke like a furnace, and it was so terrifying that everyone trembled with fear at God's appearance. God is doing the same again with His people, the church to get

us ready for His return. God needs to get the world out of His people and God does that through grace!

God is present among His people as **GRACE** so that they would know God's loving saving nature – and know what is required of them to live as Kingdom people. That's what Paul wrote to Titus, *“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people and teaches us how to live godly lives in this present age!”*

The writer of letter to the Hebrews tells us that now we have a new and better covenant than those Israelites had who left Egypt, all because God came to live among us, and that better covenant was established by Christ's blood. So, the God who spoke on earth from Mt Sinai to Moses and the Israelites centuries earlier, is the same God who now speaks to His church from Heaven. **Hebrews 12:26-27**, *“At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ The words ‘once more’ indicate the removal of what can be shaken – that is, created things – so that what cannot be shaken may remain.”* In these end times everything we depend upon will be shaken, and only what *“can't be shaken will remain.”*

And then the writer of Hebrews comes to this conclusion – **Hebrews 12:28**, *“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.”* Today, as everything that can be shaken is being shaken and continues to be shaken, the good news is that we as believers have a kingdom that can't be shaken! COVID, a recession and down-turn in the economy, the war in Ukraine, the unrest in the Middle East, corrupt political systems, and the ungodly influence in the public school system, are all signs of shaking in this world. And then there are also signs in our personal lives, as they are also being shaken by a sickness, a debilitating illness or condition, the tragic death of a loved one, family issues, work pressure, and difficulties. Shaking will come into every life and every area of life, and God uses shaking for His purposes in revealing the foundation of our faith – will it stand strong or crumble. Will the world win and destroy our faith or will we overcome this world? Will we allow God to remove the world from us and from the church?

How long will your foundation stand when shaken? How much shaking can you endure before you break? Today, God is shaking His believers and His church with all of the social issues we are facing today to compromise with the world

around us and step away from the absolute truth of His Word. God is allowing this shaking to determine who is in and who is out, who are His sheep and who are the goats. Christ is coming back for a radiant unblemished and unstained bride, and God the Father is looking for that overcoming victorious church that would be a fitting bride for His Son Jesus Christ when He returns!

Paul tells us in **1 Thessalonians 5:2-3** that the day of the lord will come like a thief in the night, catching most in the world totally unaware of the destruction that is about to come on them, and they will not escape that destruction. But the victorious church that does not crumble and fall like a house of cards will not be caught off guard, because they are awake, knowing the *“times and the seasons,”* and are not caught off guard by the schemes of the devil. Paul says this about that victorious church as he continues in **1 Thessalonians 5:4-5**, ***“But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day, who do not belong to the night or to the darkness.”*** Being awake and knowing the *“times and seasons”* means whether Jesus returns in this generation, or the next, or the next, we are always ready and expectant, and it should create a hunger within us to tell others about the returning Messiah – who is not only OUR BLESSED HOPE but the blessed hope of the world!

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism never missed an opportunity to gather people together for prayer and worship, finding the celebration of the new year to be an especially favorable time to invite people to renew their covenant promises with God. I would like us to do that today as we prepare to celebrate Communion.

John Wesley’s Covenant New Year’s Prayer

“I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will; rank me with whom you will. Put me to doing; put me to suffering. Let me be employed for you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you. Let me be full; let me be empty. Let me have all things; let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious, merciful, and

***blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine
and I am yours. So be it. And this covenant I have made
on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.***