

What do we believe? - Rev. Dr. Thomas Davis

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[0:00] Well, I'd like us to turn together for a short while to the chapter that we read in Paul's letter to Titus. As we said, Titus was a pastor on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean, and Paul wrote to him to give him instructions about leading the church there.

And if we were to have read through the whole letter, all three chapters, you'll see that this letter, like many of Paul's letters, is full of some very, very practical teaching. And that's reflecting really, I suppose, the big theme that runs through this letter.

The emphasis is that our day-to-day lives as individuals and as a church is to be shaped by what we've come to know and believe through the gospel.

And so there's that balance to be struck between what we know, what we believe, and how we live out our lives.

And that's always what the gospel is meant to result in in our lives, a transformation of what we believe, what we think, leading to a transformation in how we live.

[1:10] And that's reminding us that in our discipleship, as we follow Jesus, there is always to be assurance and action. So we want to trust with a sense of assurance in what all God has done for us in Jesus.

And that should then lead to action, whereby we live our lives for him. There's convictions and consequences. So there's the convictions that we hold, and that has consequences for the way in which we live out our day-to-day lives.

And there's doctrine and duty. What we believe shapes how we live. These things always stand side by side.

And actually, these things stand by side just in normal day-to-day life. So I am assured that exercise is good for me, that I need to do it, that it's very important. But that has no impact whatsoever unless I actually do it.

What I'm convinced of has to shape the way I behave. And that's the same with eating healthily, getting enough sleep, balancing work and rest.

[2:19] The truths that we know must always have practical application in our lives. And in lots of ways, Titus is teaching us about that.

And so as you read through the letter, you'll see lots of practical things. Paul talks about how the church should be organized in terms of leadership. He talks about how older generations and younger generations relate to one another.

The letter will speak about home and life. It will speak about interacting with the society that doesn't believe the gospel and doesn't share our convictions. He talks about what we should prioritize, what we should avoid.

How the gospel should shape our lives now and our perspective on eternity. So it's a very, very practical, very, very helpful letter.

But what I want to focus on is just the first four verses where Paul just introduces the letter. But as Paul often does, he's just writing the intro to his letter.

[3 : 16] But as he does that, he's actually throwing in tons of magnificent theology. And I want us to look at that because it's reminding us of the core of what we believe.

And if we have the core of what we believe right, then we're in a better position for it to shape the way we live. So we're asking the question, what do we believe?

And we're going to focus on verses 1 to 4. Paul, a servant of God, an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before ages began, and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior, to Titus, my true child in a common faith, grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Now these are very, very rich words, and I want us just to go through them together. I've got five points, and they're not really very memorable. I'm not very good at memorable points, but I shall read them out, and hopefully they'll be helpful for us.

So we're going to look, number one, at how the gospel unfolds over redemptive history. Number two, the gospel deals without origins and destiny.

[4 : 47] Number three, the gospel combines faith and knowledge. Number four, the gospel expects inward and outward transformation. And number five, the gospel bestows privilege and responsibility.

Now I'll just read them again, because they're impossible to remember. The gospel unfolds over redemptive history. The gospel deals with origins and destiny. The gospel combines faith and knowledge.

The gospel expects inward and outward transformation. The gospel bestows privilege and responsibility. Let's go through them one by one. So first of all, the gospel unfolds over redemptive history.

What do we mean by that? Well, in verses one to four, Paul describes how the gospel gives us the hope of eternal life that's been promised by God from all eternity, and now at the right time has been manifested and proclaimed through the preaching of Paul, of Titus, and of all who are spreading the good news.

And that's pointing us to a key aspect of what we believe about the gospel, a key aspect of how the gospel works. There is promise, fulfillment, proclamation.

[6 : 05] Promise, fulfillment, proclamation. And that pattern stretches right across the Bible, and it unfolds over what we call redemptive history.

Now that phrase is a phrase you'll often see if you're reading theology books, and it comes up again and again. Basically what it means is that God's plan of salvation, that's the redemptive bit, what God plans in terms of salvation unfolds over history.

So God doesn't do all his saving work in one go, in one instant. Instead, it's unfolded across the generations of history. You see that in the Bible, one generation to the next, the next to the next.

We call that redemptive history. God's plan to save his people unfolds across the ages of history. And there's two main eras in that redemptive history.

And you actually know what they are, even if you've never heard that phrase before. There's the era of promise and anticipation. We call that the Old Testament.

[7 : 09] And then there's the era of fulfillment and proclamation. That's called the New Testament. And that New Testament begins with the first coming of Jesus, when all the Old Testament shadows are fulfilled.

But it continues right up until the second coming of Jesus. That's very important. The New Testament doesn't end in the year 90-something, when the book of Revelation was written.

The New Testament era continues today. It continues until Jesus returns for the second time. And during that period, the gospel is proclaimed, the church is built, and the nations are reached with the good news of Jesus.

So we have these two eras, Old Testament, promise and anticipation, New Testament, fulfillment and proclamation. All of it together is what we call redemptive history. And that unfolding of God's plan over history tells us some very important things.

It's telling us that all of history is under God's sovereign rule. Everything. Every second of time. Every inch of the universe.

[8 : 17] Every ounce of energy. It's all under the sovereign rule of God. And it's telling us that all of life has meaning and purpose.

So nothing is pointless. Nothing's empty. Nothing's irrelevant. Everything has meaning. And that's why we can have categories like good and evil, truth and lies, love and justice.

It's only because of God's overarching rule that we have these categories. Otherwise, they're just something that we've made up ourselves, that just exist for a tiny period of time, and they're just really an illusion.

But we don't believe that. We believe these things are real. And they're real because the whole of history is under God's rule. And all of that means that the gospel is one united, coherent plan that comes together across the ages of history so that you can be saved.

And that's the astonishing truth, that this great plan that God is unfolding over the generations and centuries and millennia of history is to reach you so that you can be his.

[9 : 38] And today, we have the amazing privilege that we can look back and see what God has accomplished. And that's why it's actually better to be you than it is to be Abraham or Moses or David.

Jesus himself said that. He said to his disciples, Blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people long to see what you see and did not see it and to hear what you hear and did not hear it.

The giants of the Old Testament, Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, they heard the promises, but they died still awaiting their fulfillment. You and I, we're in an even better position because we can look back and we can see that God has kept his word.

And that's a very important point in terms of what we believe because at one level, we will say that the gospel is making you a promise. That's true at one level. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you'll be saved.

That's a promise. And we want to proclaim that promise. But it's probably a little bit more accurate to say that the gospel is not making a promise that we expect God to keep.

[10 : 48] It's more accurate to say that the gospel is telling you about a promise that God absolutely has kept. The unfolding of God's plan across redemptive history, the fulfillment of God's promises in the person and work of Jesus means that as you are given the gospel, God's not giving you a hopefully.

He's giving you a definitely. I've done it. Believe in me. You will absolutely be saved.

And that means that if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, you're safe and secure forever. You're safe and secure forever.

That's because the promise that is given to you in the gospel and the promise that we are brought into by faith is a promise that has already been magnificently kept by Jesus.

Sometimes we are plagued with the question, have I done enough? I think, do I know enough of the Bible?

[12:10] Have I come to church enough? Have I become a better enough person? And maybe even when you realize that actually being saved has nothing to do with church attendance or being a good enough person, it's all about faith.

But then we think, have I believed enough? Is my faith strong enough? We're plagued with that question, have I done enough?

You never need to ask that question. Because the question of the gospel is not have you done enough, the question of the gospel is has Jesus done enough?

And the answer is he most definitely has. And because we believe that, our hearts can be at peace.

That truth that we are being reminded of as every new week begins, as the gospel is proclaimed, means that you can go into this week and whatever this week might bring for you, this week might be a brilliant week, it might be a rubbish week, it might be an energizing week, it might be an exhausting week, but at every moment with your trust in Jesus, you can have peace.

[13:22] You can go to work or school or whatever tomorrow morning with a settled heart. Because Jesus has kept his promise to come and be our saviour.

The gospel unfolds over redemptive history. That's an important part of what we believe. Number two, the gospel deals with our origin and destiny. Now this is important.

When we talk about redemptive history, we're thinking right back to the beginning here, when the world was created, all the way through to the second coming of Jesus, way over here. But the gospel actually goes even beyond that.

It goes to the limits of history and beyond into eternity. That's the level that the gospel takes us to.

And it's giving us answers to the questions of our origins and our destiny. In other words, it tells us where we've come from. And it confronts us with the question of where we're going.

[14:18] Now in terms of our origin, verses 1 to 4 in Titus 1 teach us something absolutely crucial. When we think about our origin, maybe we initially think about creation, which is a good place to think.

Rightly so, the Bible teaches that we and everything else come from God. He is the creator of everything else that exists. But these verses tell you something even more than that. They tell you that you are chosen by God.

Verse 1 speaks of God's elect. That language is telling us that everyone who is a believer, everyone who becomes a believer, is chosen by God.

And that tells you something beautiful about your origin. It tells you that you are God's choice. that your origin isn't actually in the creation, the moment that the world came into existence and everything followed on from that.

Your origin is actually before that. And you have to be careful of the word before because when we're going into eternity, we're kind of stepping beyond time. But we'll just use that word. Your origin lies before that, more accurate to maybe say your origin lies above that in the mind of God, in the choice of God, in the will of God.

[15:40] And that means that that you are wanted. He chose to make you, chose to save you, chose to love you forever.

That means that if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, you are eternally His. That's an eternal choice that He's made. and that means that even if you stuff up, He is not going to change His mind.

That's why the categories that the Bible gives us are so, so magnificent because our lives are so full of mistakes. We constantly stumble, constantly mess up, and we constantly think that we are doing things that are going to make God change His mind about us.

He is never changing His mind about you. You are His forever. Our origin is grounded in the will of God, the choice of God.

Everyone who's a Christian, everyone who becomes a Christian can rest in the fact, not thinking, oh, I chose God, but actually rest in thinking, He chose me. That's a beautiful truth that Paul emphasizes to us here about our origins, but these verses also speak about our destiny.

[17:06] It speaks of the hope of eternal life in verse 2. Now, when we speak about that hope of eternal life, that whole concept of eternal life, the Bible reveals to us what we call a balance between already and not yet.

So when we talk about eternal life, there's already and there's not yet. So there's aspects of God's promise of eternal life that we know and experience now. Jesus said, Truly I say to you, whoever hears my word believes him who sent me has eternal life.

Does not pass into judgment, but has passed from death to life. We have that new life now. That's why we gather on the first day of the week as a new week comes to life. We gather, celebrating the eternal life that we have through Jesus.

So there's an already experience for us, but there's also a not yet, because there's so much more to come. Jesus spoke about that as well. He says, Truly I say to you, there's no one who's left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive many times more in this time and in the age to come eternal life.

And so there's this great promise of God's, of the outpouring of God's blessing on all who trust in Jesus. Now, the church, part of our role as the church as we gather each week and as we go through our lives together, part of our role is to be a foretaste of that so that people can see already what is going to come for all who trust in Jesus.

[18:34] And so we believe in the great promises of the new creation where Jesus will return and renew everything, our bodies, the created world, and we will enjoy all the beauty and wonder of his creation.

Our church is to be a foretaste foretaste of that now, a glimpse of it. And that, of course, explains to us why there's so many instructions in the Bible about avoiding worldliness in the church.

And so as we go into our lives each week, whether it's in school, you go to school, people give you a hard time, people are difficult, awkward, unkind, cruel, that's the way the world works.

You go to work, it's the same. People talk about you, people can be difficult as customers, people will hurt one another, people will gossip at one another, all that kind of stuff. People will use power for their own benefit rather than being kind.

The world, the worldliness of the world is something that's so broken and so damaging. And that's why you encounter rubbish stuff at work and at school and sometimes even in the home and in our communities.

[19:42] And the Bible is constantly telling us as a church, don't be like that. Instead, when people walk in here, they should see something different. Then they do see something different.

They see people who love one another and who stick together no matter what and who are centered and united because of their love for Jesus.

All of this is reminding us that in the gospel, we have a precious origin and a beautiful destiny. That is one of the core and most important claims of the gospel.

A precious origin and a beautiful destiny for all who trust in Jesus. And that stands in sharp, sharp contrast to the alternatives that we have to the Christian religion.

And if you look at the alternatives today, people will say, well, we have a meaningless origin and we have an empty destiny and we've just got to make the most of the bit in between.

[20 : 46] That's the worldview that many people are accepting and the alternative that the gospel offers us is so much better.

That your origin is precious. Your destiny can be amazing. Amazing. That's what the gospel wants us to have.

The gospel gives you the only origin that makes sense to our minds and it gives you the destiny that will actually blow your mind in its beauty and wonder.

The gospel deals with our origins and our destiny. Number three, the gospel combines faith and knowledge. If you look again at verse one, you can see these two words come up.

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness. It's reminding us that as Christians we have faith and knowledge and that's so important because as I was saying to the kids earlier, often people think you have to choose between the two and people think, you know, it's kind of faith or facts, religion or science, you know, kind of vague, empty, blind faith or concrete, concrete information that I can rely on.

[22 : 09] People think that you're kind of making this choice but it's not true. When people think that it's a choice then they think, well, being a Christian, oh, it's nice but it's a bit naive, it's a bit sort of blind and hopeful and sometimes people will speak about faith as though, you know, you're believing something even though deep down you know it's not true and instead if you want to have reliable knowledge you need to be rational and logical and intelligent and you really need to leave faith behind and what I want us to say is that it's so important that you always remember that that idea is completely untrue and it's completely untrue in all areas of knowledge and that was what I was trying to explain to the kids with my silly names in the children's talk that the only way I can know your name is by faith.

The only way you know your name is by faith. By trusting what you've been told and it's true of so many other areas of life. You pick up and read something.

You have to exercise faith to know whether or not that is true and today it's so interesting because the truth is now so manipulated. When I was young there used to be a phrase the camera never lies I'm pretty sure now you could say the camera never tells the truth because of the way technology works and in so many other ways that's the same and I guess I know I'm laboring this point but I think I found it so helpful when this was explained to me I hope it's very helpful for you whether you're conducting a science experiment whether you're solving a maths equation or whether you're even debating your own existence the only way you can know anything is by faith in the pursuit of knowledge we are constantly exercising faith faith is crucial for a human to have any knowledge about anything and that's teaching us a really important thing about the gospel it's teaching us and reminding us that the bible never asks you to have a kind of blind irrational stab in the dark faith in the gospel faith is not blind it is informed in the gospel there is revelation and response truth is revealed and we need to respond to that

God reveals himself to us we need to respond to him by trusting him and growing in our knowledge of him and of everything else and the great claim of the gospel and of the biblical worldview is actually it's only by faith in God that you will understand anything truly and I think that's true it's only by our faith that anything else actually it's only by faith in God that anything else absolutely will make sense that's why a disciple of Jesus is a believer and a learner the word disciple actually means learner so as we follow Jesus we are following him in faith and we are learning more and more as we go and that's what Paul emphasizes here that the faith that we have in God is going to bring us into a deeper knowledge of the truth that's such an important phrase a knowledge of the truth it's reminding us that the gospel is only ever interested in dealing with the truth the gospel is only ever interested in dealing with the truth it's not about advice or ideas or myths or feelings it's only interested in the truth the truth about life and death the truth about origins and destiny the truth about time and eternity the truth about right and wrong the truth about humanity and God that is all we're interested in the gospel stands and falls on the question of truth and central to that is the truth of the resurrection if Jesus did not rise from the dead none of this means anything if he did rise from the dead we have the truth and that's why it's important to recognize that the gospel is not actually offering you something that will make you feel good sometimes the gospel will make you feel good there are times when it will make you feel more amazing than anything else but often as

Christians we don't feel good and life can be very very hard the gospel is not primarily offering you something that will make you feel good first and foremost the gospel is offering you something that makes sense the gospel is offering you something that makes sense of who we are of what life is all about and that's why asking the question do you want the gospel is just another way of asking the question do you want the truth Jesus said if you abide in my word you are truly my disciples you will know the truth and the truth will set you free and it's really important to remember that if you think you know if you're sitting here today and maybe you are sitting today and you think I am not convinced that the gospel is true that's okay if you think like that but please if you think like that you have to investigate more you have to talk to somebody more and investigate this because

[27 : 28] I would say that if you think the gospel is untrue it means you're misunderstanding it and what you're rejecting is not actually what the gospel is teaching so we believe God's word is the truth and we long to learn more and more from it now one important thing to say there is that these are always areas of growth faith and knowledge are always areas of growth one of the things that I find fascinating when I think about when I became a Christian I was about 14 I honestly knew pretty much nothing even though I've been going to church my whole life my parents are Christians and I'd seen so much in them still there was so much that I did not know and all I can say I really knew I really knew that I needed Jesus that's what I knew and since then I've learned a lot and I've got loads more that I still need to learn so we grow in knowledge and when I came to faith my faith was just very simple and you know we grow in faith as we go but the big point that we have to emphasize is that we start with a trembling faith with a basic knowledge and as disciples day by day we grow as believers and learners number four time's running out super fast the last two gospel expects inward and outward transformation transformation the faith and knowledge of God's people

Paul speaks about accords with godliness you see that in verse one and I think the big emphasis here is that the faith and knowledge that we have doesn't just stay inward it must transform the way that we live as well and that's the big theme running through Titus that what we believe in the gospel is to shape our lifestyle to shape the way that we live and that's just a fundamental emphasis of the gospel what we believe inwardly shapes how we live outwardly that's the pattern of discipleship so we trust and revere and love God in our hearts and that should show itself in a life that's shaped by faith and reverence and love towards God in other words in terms of our love towards God people should see it before we have to see it people should see it in us before we have to see it now as soon as I say that

I feel stung with guilt and a sense of guilt and failure I remember when I went in for ministry I'd been working as an engineer and there was a guy who worked with us from time to time and he said oh I heard you're going in for the ministry and he said I didn't know you were religious and I said oh man we spent like a year working together and he didn't see it in me and I was like oh you know I felt like you look back in life and that was like that's a sad moment in my life for me and it's just but it's also a sad moment can be a good lesson and it was a good lesson and it's reminding me that the way I live the way I speak the way I conduct myself that should be visible and seen to those around us now we make loads of mistakes along the way I've clearly made mistakes along the way but every week this is why we come together it's so good that church meets at the start of a new week first thing we do this week we come together and we're like right Lord yes this week is a new week and I want my life to be shaped by your word another way of saying this is just to say that the gospel is utterly anti-hypocrisy and that's something that

Jesus emphasized again and again and again the gospel is anti-hypocrisy Jesus has no interest in those who will sort of say oh yeah inwardly I believe this but then outwardly has no effect on the way you live Jesus is like that is not what the gospel is all about the faith that we have the inward relationship we have with the Lord needs to shape the way we live out our lives the gospel expects inward and outward transformation so what are my five points the gospel unfolds over a redemptive history the gospel deals with origins and destiny the gospel combines faith and knowledge the gospel expects inward and outward transformation lastly the gospel bestows privilege and responsibility and that balance of privilege and responsibility is captured at the end of verse 3 Paul says that he's been entrusted by the command of God now there's a beautiful balance Paul has been entrusted with something that speaks of an extraordinary privilege God has revealed this life-saving life-changing message and it's entrusted to Paul to Titus to Timothy to us it's a massive privilege to have that but he also describes that as a command and that brings responsibility we're entrusted and commanded and that's such an important balance so the privilege that we have of knowing

Jesus and having his word with that comes the command to share that and to live out our lives in a way that bears witness to our saviour that balance of privilege and responsibility runs right through redemptive history it's a key aspect of what it means to be in a covenant relationship with God it's also key to a healthy relationship privilege and responsibility all of it tells you something crucial it tells you that the gospel is wonderful and serious the gospel is utterly wonderful it's the best thing that's ever happened to me and to every Christian here the gospel is unbelievably serious nothing matters more and you know that's actually what makes the gospel so good because the very best things in life are always wonderful and serious when a family is wonderful it's also the thing that you take most seriously doing well in your career is wonderful but that's only possible because you take it seriously doing well in sport wonderful you can't do it unless you take it seriously in all the best aspects of life it's wonderful and serious that is true most of all about the gospel it is wonderful and serious that means that it's so exciting in terms of the privilege of knowing

[34:18] Jesus and following him but it's convicting I need to follow him and listen to him it's amazing to know Jesus it's urgent nothing matters more the gospel bestows privilege and responsibility my heart yearns for both these words are an amazing reminder of what the gospel involves it's an amazing reminder of what we believe may we go into this week together knowing and understanding more of what God has done for us through our saviour and may our eyes always be fixed on him amen let's pray father we thank you so much for the gospel help us to understand more of what you're revealing to us and may that shape our lives this week and for the rest of our lives bless each one of us lead us and guide us and may your name be honoured and glorified in Jesus name amen we're going to conclude singing from Psalm 103 and we're singing the sing psalms version

Psalm 103 and that's on page 135 praise God my soul with all my heart let me exalt his holy name forget not all his benefits his praise my soul in song proclaim verses 1 to 11 Psalm 103 to God's praise please God my soul with all my heart let me exalt his holy name forgive not all his benefits his praise my soul in song proclaim the Lord forgives you all your sins and heals your sickness and distress your life he rescues from the grave and crowns you in his tenderness and crowns you in his tenderness he satisfies your deep desire from his unending stores occurred so that just like the and the and the and the!

the! the Lord is known for righteous acts and justice did and drawn in wants to Moses he made known his ways his mighty deeds to Israel's sons his mighty deeds to Israel's sons the Lord is merciful and kind to anger slow and full of grace he will not constantly reprove or in his anger hide his face he does not polish our mistakes or give our sins their just reward and greatest love as high as heaven towards all those who fear the

Lord towards all those who fear the Lord as we go into a new week may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all Amen holy holy