WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT WEEK OF MAY 30, 2023

May 29

No devotional today for the holiday.

May 30

Grace and peace to you this day.

This week we will continue our walk through the books of the Bible and take a brief look at the book of Titus. Titus is one of three so-called. “Pastoral Letters” written by Paul (along with 1 and 2 Timothy) and is one of his shortest, three chapters in all. It opens like this:

“Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ…” (1:1). The Greek word Paul uses here for “bondservant” is *doulos*. It can mean a slave as we understand that word, but can also mean a servant, or an attendant. In any case, in the social constructs of the day, it is a lowly position to be sure.

Later on in the letter, in chapter 2, Paul uses the same word but in a different context:

“Teach bondservants to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (vs. 9-10).

Paul calls himself a bondservant, or slave, and then tells Titus to teach slaves “to be subject to their masters.” What do we make of this? Is Paul likening himself to a common 1st century slave? Well, in some ways…yes.

First of all, slavery was a very widespread fact of life in the 1st century world. There was nothing at all uncommon about it. What is utterly uncommon, however, is that Paul, a free man and Roman citizen, calls himself a slave, and not just any slave, but a “slave of God.” In doing so, he elevates the lowly position of slave to a position of honor: a servant not of man, but of the Almighty.

Next, he instructs Titus to teach the slaves of the day to be subject to their masters in every way, though not for the sake of their masters, but so that “they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.”

I do not think for a moment that Paul condoned slavery. He is simply writing within the context of his day, In fact, he shocked the world by encouraging slaves and masters to attend church together. And in encouraging slaves to obey their masters, Paul is saying that it is the slaves who are setting the example. The teachings of Christ turn the world upside down and in modelling servanthood, slaves are teaching their masters what it is to be servants of Christ.

Then, as now, the teachings of unheard of. The teachings of Jesus were unprecedented. The teachings of Jesus were unmatched. They were radical, they
were extreme, and they were outlandish. But more than anything, the teachings of Jesus were, and are...Truth.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

May 31
Grace and peace to you this day.

As we continue our brief look at Paul’s letter to Titus, let me start with this: Few places in Scripture are more evident of the cultural climate, and its distance from modern culture, than in the writings of Paul. Or at least, so it seems.

As I said a week or two ago, I had a seminary colleague who once said that “Paul’s writing is out of step with modern times.” My response to that was “Maybe modern times are out of step with Paul’s writing.” Let’s take a look.’

“[The older women should] urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God” (2:4-6).

This passage, if left to stand alone, might seem to ring hollow to some modern ears. And, if read in isolation and out of context, it does seem to sound a bit tone deaf. However, Paul is not done:

“Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech…” (2:6-7).

Paul uses the word “similarly” here as a “linking” word. His instructions to the young women go hand in hand with his instructions to the young men. Neither stand in isolation. Both encourage love, mutual respect, and a recognition that all persons, as bearing the image of God, have equal dignity.

His concluding paragraph of chapter 2 begins with this: “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people” (v. 11).

Paul’s message is clear, and it is simple: respect each other, love each other, honor each other. And above all else, always remember that “all people” are the purchase of the Savior’s sacrifice.

IHS,
Pastor Lou
June 1

Grace and peace to you this day.

As we conclude our very brief look at the book of Titus, I am reminded that one of the themes of Paul’s letters is the eternal nature of God. This is what Paul says:

“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time…” (1:1-2).

First, we notice that God makes a promise “before the beginning of time.” That speaks to God’s eternal nature. I remember the nuns teaching us about God being eternal when I was a young boy growing up in the Catholic church. I had so many questions I wanted to ask about that (but didn’t dare to because, well, the nuns were kind of scary!). But I remember thinking:

How could God not have a beginning?

Did someone make God? If so, where did he come from?

How old is God?

How can someone or something not have a beginning? Or an ending?

As I think about those things, it occurs to me that while God’s eternal nature is an awesome mystery, the even more awesome part is this: “The promise.”

Since before time itself, since before Creation, since before we were born, God made a promise: and that promise was salvation. Redemption. Love. Mercy. And grace. The problem to save us and reconcile us to Him through the sacrifice of His Son.

That was always the plan, born of God’s great love, and always the promise. That if we place our eternal trust in our eternal God’s son, then His eternal promise would usher us into eternity...with Him.

IHS,

Pastor Lou

June 2

Happy Friday, everyone! Here’s your musical devotional for the week. Turn up the volume and enjoy!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbu8YnegTF4

IHS,
Pastor Lou