

Titus 2:11-14 – “He Appeared Bringing Salvation”

Pr. Kurt A. Van Fossan – The Nativity of Our Lord (Christmas Day) 2021

The reason I chose to preach on Titus this Christmas Day service is because of the Good News it clearly teaches about our salvation—that Jesus Christ was born “*bringing salvation for all people.*” This salvation, which is brought to us as a free gift, continues to be under attack by our sinful nature and many in our world and even in parts of the church today who want us to think that we can do things which in truth only God can do. That’s why Paul instructs Titus earlier in this letter to rebuke false teachers and their false teaching while at the same time being careful himself to teach the truth, including and especially the truth that we are saved by the grace of God.

You know the phrase ‘not one iota,’ which means not even the smallest of things? It comes from Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:18 where He says, “*For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass away from the Law until all is accomplished.*” Iota (ιώτα) is a Greek word which refers to the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet (i). Leaving this smallest of letters out of a word (or adding an i) can change the meaning of that word. The first verse of our text is a good example.

When translating verse 11 of our text, “*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,*” the Latin translation of the Bible (called the Vulgate) leaves out an iota from the Greek word σωτήριος translated “*salvation.*” By doing so it changes the word from salvation to the word σωτήρ translated “*Savior.*” Therefore, while our translation from the original Greek says “*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,*” the Latin translation says, “*For the grace of God our Savior has appeared to all people.*” So, instead of God “*bring salvation for all people,*” as God’s Word says, the Latin translation (which, by the way, was the version of the Bible used in the Roman Catholic church for over 1500 years) says that our gracious God simply appears to all people. This fits in better with the RC teaching that Jesus came not to give us salvation but to give us the ability to complete our salvation by our good works.

The truth is that the only way to payoff the debt of sin, or to be set free from our sins, is through death. “*The wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23), not good works. That’s why the sinless Son of God was born into our flesh, not to be our Supervisor but to be our Savior—to save us from our sins and death through His death and almighty resurrection from the dead in His glorified body. “*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

Having said all that, Paul continues by also speaking of *“training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works.”*

This is the other reason I wanted to preach on this text this morning. As important as it is to teach the Good News that Jesus Christ was born to save us from our sins and death through His death and resurrection, and that through our Baptism and faith in Jesus Christ we inherit His completed work of salvation and are therefore saved, it is also important that we are *“zealous for good works.”* This is also part of God’s message to us, and therefore a part of what we believe, teach and confess as God’s people.

While it’s true that we are saved not by any good works we do, but by God’s grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ death and resurrection for our salvation, this saving faith is bound to produce good works—to cause us to want to live according to the way God says is best for us and those around us. Such good works do not save us. Instead they flow from our God given faith in our salvation through Jesus Christ. That’s why Jesus said, *“So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants’”* (Lk 17:10).

Therefore, this Christmas we rejoice in the birth of our Savior, who came not to Supervise us but to Save us, which He continue to do this morning through His Word and the Lord’s Supper. And as God’s forgiven people, we continue to do all that we can, by God’s grace, to demonstrate our faith in Jesus Christ by living the way God tells us in the Bible, not the way our sinful nature tells us. And one of the most important things God tells us to do is to tell others the Good News that in Jesus Christ, *“the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people,”* this Christmas and always.

All glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

[Children’s Sermon] An Ethiopian man named Bukuma, who was a member of a congregation I served in England, told me that during special days like Christmas his whole family gets together for a big feast. But instead of feeding themselves, they feed the person next to them.

This reminds them and us of the main reason God leaves us here for the time being as His saved people. We’re not here to save ourselves, but to save others.

What’s the best good thing we can do for others to save them from their sins and death? Tell them about Jesus Christ who was born, died and rose from the dead to free us from our sins and all the effects of sin, especially death. Jesus is the Bread of Life. [Share bit size Christmas cookies].