

Lake Cities Community Church
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Take the Next Step – Titus 1:1-4
Pastor Craig Schill

“Take The Next Step”

A great coach is able to take a team from mediocrity to greatness by both inspiring the good and correcting the bad. The Dallas Cowboys coach, Wade Phillips is rightly getting credit for the Cowboys turnaround season. If you listen to the locker room comments he has inspired the team by saying things like, “We are a family – We are going to be loyal to each other and have a common purpose.” Coaches also correct the problems. The great John Madden said, “Coaches have to watch for what they don't want to see and listen to what they don't want to hear.” (American broadcaster, Football coach and Analyst, He coached the Oakland Raiders, 1969-79. b.1936).

The most effective coaches also bring a level of expertise to their jobs. In the 1950's the country of Ethiopia had a good marathon running program. The people of Ethiopia are natural runners. But they had a problem – they never won anything. They were good but not great. They competed in the 1956 Olympics but did not win any medals. They wanted to make an impact in their sport, but they just didn't know how to do it. They lacked one thing – proper coaching. So they hired the best coach they could find, a man named Onni Niskanen from Sweden. He had great expertise and credibility in the sport of marathon running. He was the best and he helped them take it to the next level.

I am thinking about coaching because I am the assistant coach for Hudson's 1-2nd grade basketball team. I bring no expertise or credibility to the task. My only basketball credentials are that I played one year in church league and received a dubious “most improved player” award.

But they provided some training, and so I am going to do my best to inspire and correct those boys.

But coaches are not just for sports anymore. Karl Rove, a political coach, achieved great victories and current candidates are seeking people like him for their campaigns. In the workplace are professional life coaches, like a friend of mine Sue Sager who helps people achieve professional and personal victories.

Could you use some coaching this morning? Someone who brings expertise and credibility to your situation. Would you like someone to inspire you, and perhaps correct you? Well, there is the rub – the correction. For a coach to be successful, we have to listen to him or her and be willing to make changes – to take the next step. This morning we are going to meet the ultimate coach – the Apostle Paul. He is going to be our spiritual coach for the next three months as we open up the book of Titus. This morning we are going to look at verses 1-4, Paul's greeting:

Background

But before we do that, let me give you some brief background. Titus is actually a letter, written from Paul to Titus in about 63 A.D. Titus is Paul's representative on the beautiful Island of Crete, assigned there to help the church get established. Timothy was similarly left in Ephesus and the letter of 1 Timothy shares many similarities to Titus and was written about the same time. Crete is just off of Greece, a beautiful location in the Mediterranean Sea. Although Crete was a beautiful location, the people were definitely a challenge. Cretans were generally known as liars, evil people and gluttons and as we will see in the letter, some of those characteristics made it into the church. Crete was known as the birthplace of Zeus, and had a strong Greek

background. But there was also a strong Jewish population on the Island and people from Crete were present on the day of Pentecost. It could be these converts that began the first church on the Island. Later Paul visited briefly and gave instruction to the church, but he didn't have time to finish the work, and so in this letter Paul coaches Titus, who in turn is going to coach the Cretan church to take the next steps of faith.

Exposition:

Verse 1:

The introduction is in verses 1-4. Please turn in your Bibles with me to Titus. For this series, I am going to use a different translation - the New English Translation – the NET Bible:

Titus 1:1 From Paul, a slave of God and apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God's chosen ones and the knowledge of the truth that is in keeping with godliness,

Paul begins with his credentials – as a slave of God – or servant of God in the spirit of an Old Testament prophet. That is, Paul does not come to the church under his own authority but the authority of God Himself. Next, he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. An apostle is someone who is sent out to do a task – the picture of the Greek word is that of a ship loaded and ready to be launched from port. What is his commission? To further the faith of God's chosen ones – the elect – that is Christians - to help them on their journey of faith to travel from here to there!

Sound Doctrine: And this faith is not a general spirituality but a specific faith based on knowledge of the truth. Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?” Jack Nicholson told Tom Cruise, “You can't handle the truth.” Paul is going to tell Titus to tell the church that Christianity is true and that the people need to handle the truth by living by the truth!

The need for sound doctrine – or truth is the first major teaching of the book. We will see that the church was in fact overrun with false teaching. Look down at chapter 1 and verse 10: “There are many rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers” (1:10). Elders were needed to counteract these false teachers and to promote the truth (1:8-9). He tells Titus in chapter 2, verse one, “communicate the behavior that goes with sound teaching.”

This is an important message for us as a young church. We live in a post-modern world where truth is relative. This makes it so easy for us to rationalize sin and to fall for modern forms of false teaching. Once the Devil was walking along with one of his demons. They saw a man ahead of them pick up something shiny. "What did he find?" asked the cohort. "A piece of the truth," the Devil replied. "Doesn't it bother you that he found a piece of the truth?" asked the demon. "No," said the Devil, "I will see to it that he makes a religion out of it." (Klyne Snodgrass, *Between Two Truths - Living with Biblical Tensions*, 1990, Zondervan Publishing House, p. 35.) False teaching whether it is a cult-like religion, or just a pseudo-Christian fad, often has a nugget of truth, which attracts people like bait on a hook.

Good Deeds: Let's continue in our verse. Real truth, Paul says, “is in keeping with godliness” – that is, it leads us to be more like Jesus. This introduces the second major theme in the book. You see, the people were not leading godly lives, but they were, to be frank, hypocrites, professing one thing and acting differently .

For example, turn over to chapter two, verse three; Paul says to the older women “exhibit behavior fitting of those who are holy.” (2:3) Apparently the older women needed this exhortation. To the young men he said, “be an example of good works in every way (2:7). To the whole church, “be ready for every good work.” Paul is exhorting the church through Titus, *because the church was not engaging in good works* in other words their behavior did not match

their profession. The result was that the gospel was being discredited. He tells the young women to behave in a godly way so that, verse 5 the message of God would not be discredited, in verse 8 he references enemies who have been given ammunition against the faith because of this hypocrisy.

There was a young boy who was raised in a good evangelistic church. He turned away from Christianity and became one of its most biting critics. His name was Mark Twain. Why did he turn away from the faith? The inconsistency of the elders of his church – they preached one thing and lived a different way. Twain said, “The church is always trying to get other people to reform; it might not be a bad idea to reform itself a little, by way of example.” And “If Christ were here there is one thing he would not be--a Christian.” He smelled the bitter odor of hypocrisy and it stayed with him his whole life.

First major theme – the truth – sound doctrine. The second major theme – good works – consistently of one’s walk with their talk. Let’s continue with verse two:

Verse 2

[Titus 1:2](#) in hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the ages began.

This faith Paul is talking about is grounded in the hope of eternal life. Remember our definition of biblical hope is from a few weeks ago? “A confident expectation of good things in the future, because of our faith in Jesus Christ.” Eternal life is certainly a glorious thing in our futures! We have confident expectation of this because it comes from God – who does not lie. The Greek word for lying is “*pseudos*” – from which we get our English *pseudo*. We might rightly call astrology a pseudo-science – that is a false science. God, in the Greek is *a-pseudos* – he does not lie. And this eternal life – it was promised before the ages began. The Greek is

literally “*before eternal time.*” This is difficult to get one’s mind around. Prior to creation – the promise of eternal life was a done deal, sealed in the holy mystery and trinity of the godhead.

Verse three

Titus 1:3 But now in his own time he has made his message evident through the preaching I was entrusted with according to the command of God our Savior.

Verse 3 – But now in his own time he has made his message evident. That promise shrouded for generations has now come to pass. What is the message? It is the gospel – The good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection! As in other places Paul says that he was entrusted with it according to the command of God our Savior.

Here I would like to introduce the third major theme of the book – that of authority. Have you noticed how forceful Paul is? He comes under the command of God! He sounds like a medieval crusader. A slave of God – an Apostle of Jesus Christ. “I have the truth” Paul says – entrusted to me by Jesus Himself. That is pretty strong. God is referenced five times by Paul in these four verses.

Paul is a coach with great authority. Paul is saying, “Listen to me, I have something to say. I have the authority of God on my side so when I talk with you about the truth and about good works – about how the church should be set up – listen to me!” Martin Luther King once said, “When you are right you cannot be too radical; when you are wrong, you cannot be too conservative.” Paul is radical and authoritative.

This spiritual authority is exactly what Paul and Titus need to model to the church. You see the church at Crete had a problem with authority. First, they had no internal authority structure. Paul’s first command, in chapter one and verse five is to “Appoint elders in every

town” (1:5). The lack of authority structure had opened the door for the false teachers. But it was even more than that. The slaves, chapter 2, verse nine needed to be reminded that their masters had authority over them, and they were not to rebel. Paul was worried that the church would not take Titus’ authority serious, and so Paul exhorts Titus in chapter 2 and verse 15 to “communicate these things with full authority.” When Paul moves to talk about the church’s interaction with the community around them, he says in chapter 3 and verse one, “remind them to be subject to the rules and authorities.”

A Christian t-shirt company makes a shirt that says, “Question authority, Jesus did.” What do you think of that? We need to be careful here. Authority is a gift from God and a blessing to the church. It is the *abuse* of authority that gets us into trouble.

Christian Herter was governor of Massachusetts from 1953 to 1957. He was running hard for a second term in office. One day, after a busy morning chasing votes (and no lunch) he arrived at a church barbecue. It was late afternoon and Herter was famished. As Herter moved down the serving line, he held out his plate to the woman serving chicken. She put a piece on his plate and turned to the next person in line. "Excuse me," Governor Herter said, "do you mind if I have another piece of chicken?" "Sorry," the woman told him. "I'm supposed to give one piece of chicken to each person." "But I'm starved," the governor said. "Sorry," the woman said again. "Only one to a customer." Governor Herter was a modest and unassuming man, but he decided that this time he would throw a little weight around. "Do you know who I am?" he said. "I am the governor of this state." "Do you know who I am?" the woman said. "I'm the lady in charge of the chicken.”

The church at Crete had a problem with authority and Paul is saying, Listen to me – I have authority and if you want to take the next step – if you want to grow in maturity, listen to the coach.

Verse 4

Titus 1:4: To Titus, my genuine son in a common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior!

What do we know about Titus? Because he is referred to as Paul's "genuine son" we take it that he was a convert under Paul's early ministry. We know he is not Jewish but a Gentile, and became a case study that led to the great first church council in Acts 15 on whether a Gentile had to be circumcised – he was not. His character becomes clear as Paul entrusted him to take care of a sensitive matter of immorality at the church in Corinth, which Titus handled with diplomacy and grace. He became a trusted co-laborer with Paul – a man who could be trusted to do things right and do them the right way. Donald Guthrie commented: "It is clear that Titus was a man of unusual tact who possessed high qualities of leadership." Donald Guthrie (*The Pastoral Epistles*, 195).

It is into this man's hands that Paul entrusts the Cretan church – to coach them and take them the next step. To deal with the false teaching, the hypocrisy and the authority issues, but promoting sound doctrine, good deeds and integrity in lifestyle. Would he be successful? I guess it depends on whether the people would listen to him or not.

Do you need a coach in your life – to help you take the next step – the question is will you listen to the coach? Will you submit to his or her counsel? Will you discipline yourself and take both her inspiration and his correction?

Application: Here is your application for this week. First, *read* the book of Titus, it is short, only three chapters. And as you do *look* for these three themes – authority, sound doctrine and good deeds and *think* about how they can apply to your life and to the life of our church and then you can take the next step!

Conclusion: Abebe Bikila was born in 1932 in Ethiopia. He was the son of a shepherd. As a young man he joined the national-guard to earn money for his family. He loved to run and often raced whenever he could. In 1959 Onni Niskanen set up a training camp and recognized Abebe as a runner with potential but maybe Abebe's greatest asset was that he listened to his coach. He worked hard and made it on to the Ethiopian team to compete in the Marathon at the 1960 Olympic games. One problem came up just before the race – all the shoes they tried to fit on Abebe did not fit – so he decides to run the race barefoot – 26 miles over rough cobble stone. There were four other runners favored in the race, but Abebe won that race and became the first African and the first Ethiopian to win a gold medal. He would win a second gold medal in 1964 olympics. He is a legend in the world of marathon running.

But perhaps the untold story is that of the Swedish coach who inspired and challenged him. Are you ready to be inspired and challenged over the next three months, as we go through this book together? If we are going to take the next step together – we need to listen to the coach. The message Paul had for the church at Crete is a message for us today. Let's pray.