

Fruitfulness and the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Good morning, Watermark. Happy anniversary. Come on. That's right. I know, that was my fault. Happy anniversary. That's right. Which anniversary are we at? That's right. Six years, and it's amazing. I haven't, my name is Jeremy, if you don't know me. I oversee a bunch of things. I'm part of the, I guess you can say, the pastoral staff here. I oversee the music as well. So it's amazing for me, even though I haven't been around quite as long as Melissa and Mervyn, to just see God raise up leaders and see people use their gifts and go from a place where they don't even believe in themselves or they don't believe they have a talent or gift and see God encourage them and multiply them. And I love what Mervyn said. I'm glad it's sinking in that the team, the musicians, they're not here to perform to us. They're here to facilitate our worship of God. And as I was standing in the back there, I was listening to you guys sing, and it sounded great. And the beauty of singing together is actually very simple from a musical point of view. Even if someone's out of tune, it kind of like blends in with everybody. And beyond that, it's also great because I think God designed us to worship together. And not to come in here and listen to one or two people sing, but to actually hear each other, hear a voice in unison that says, worthy is the Lamb, the Lamb Jesus Christ who was slain. Amen? So when you guys sing together, when you guys listen to each other, remind yourselves of that, that it's not about listening to people, but being in one voice, united for God. And in the same way today, even as I'm preaching a sermon, I'm reminded that I am not, you are listening to me, yes, obviously, in a technical sense. But we are all listening to the Word of God, and I am a facilitator of worship. I am not here to bring you to Jesus. Jesus is doing that. I'm not here to facilitate and be a mediator between you and God. Jesus has done that. So if you take nothing from the sermon today,

I pray that you would just glance over to that banner multiple times throughout the sermon. Just remember, Jesus is the one who brings you to a holy and perfect God. Jesus' death on the cross is the one, is the thing that saves you. Let me just pray for us, pray for me as we begin.

Father, we want to cast our eyes. You want to gaze at the beauty of the cross, where you died that horrific death, but showed us how much you love us. So I pray right now, as we conclude this series on the book of Titus, that we would be transformed, that the truth of the gospel would actually sink into the depths of our hearts, to our very gut, Lord, and actually move us, actually make a difference in how we think, and how we behave, and how we interact with this church and this world. I pray that anything that you would want to speak specifically to us right now, I pray that you would just impress that on our hearts individually, whatever it is in this message, whatever it is in this passage, and we pray these things in the precious Son's name, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.

So as I was saying, we are at the very end of this series on Titus, this letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to Titus, who was overseeing this church in Crete, and we've been on this journey of exploring how the truth of the gospel, it's not just a truth that you think about and you hear about, but it actually, if properly understood and received, it actually transforms our lives. And we've heard that this transformation doesn't just happen on an individual level, but also at a corporate level, that our calling as Christians is to actually train one another in this church, so that we actually become a community, a community that is transformed by God's truth.

We've learned how God raises up godly leaders, elders and other leaders, to oversee the church family, and also to protect us from false teaching, teaching like the performance-based religion we've heard about so much, the PBR virus that Chris has mentioned before.

[4 : 54] This teaching says that we need to earn God's love. We need to earn God's acceptance, and that is false teaching because we cannot do that. Mervyn and Melissa made such a great sort of just reference to that. How about it's grace? It's grace. It's grace, and we never want to forget that truth.

We've also learned that everyone in the church, every single person is called, called by God, if you are a Christian, to help train up someone else, someone who's younger in the faith. And a big part of this training is encouraging each other in good works, good works that are a natural, inevitable results of true faith in Christ. And if you remember last week, we heard about this amazing subversive power of good works because it's totally countercultural. It's filled and fueled and motivated by grace and love, and the world has not seen that kind of subversive good works. So as we look at this closing passage of Titus today, you can see all these things summarized in the passage. In verse 8 that we just heard, the Apostle Paul writes this, the saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

Now what's he referring to? What is this that is so important that we must insist upon it? It's the gospel. It's the gospel that he's been talking about through the letter and also in throughout chapter 3. And when you have a moment tonight, I encourage you, go home, read the entire letter of Titus. You know, it's not very long, but at least read through chapter 3 from beginning to end, and you'll be able to see a clear picture of how Paul just lays out the gospel point by point.

The theologian John Stott, he calls this the six ingredients of salvation. And just to help us have like a background, let's just review them briefly. You can see them on the screen right there.

The first ingredient of salvation is that we have a need for salvation. You don't realize you need to be saved until you realize that you need to be saved. And there's something wrong, there's something broken, there's something grossly imperfect about our lives. And that's the first thing. We realize that we have a need for salvation. And secondly, you'll see when you read chapter 3 tonight, there's a source of salvation, and that's God's gracious, loving kindness. He's the one who actually looks at us and says, there's no way that Jeremy and any of us can reach God. He is the initiator. He is the one that steps into our lives. He's the one who is full of grace and loving kindness. Thirdly, the ground for salvation, the basis, the foundation for our salvation is not our works. It's not what we can do, but it's on the cross. It's the mercy that God shows us so that we can never boast and say, oh, I did this. I'm so good. God, you have to accept me. We always say Jesus was the only one who lived perfectly. And fourthly, the means of salvation. How do we actually attain this salvation? It's through the Holy Spirit.

[8 : 35] As the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and grows us and brings us to this point of confession that Jesus is Lord. It's through the Holy Spirit also working in our lives. And fifthly, the goal of salvation. You'll see that Paul talks about eternal life, our eternal destination in relationship with God, in his presence, in his presence, so that everything we do today is done in light of that eternal reality.

And you will live very differently when you know you have an eternal assurance because you aren't just living for this lifetime. You are living for so much more so that when you understand points one to five, the inevitable evidence of salvation. As Paul wraps up here in verse eight, is our devotion to good works.

Paul tells us to insist on these things because we learn and we experience these elements of gospel, of this gospel, and the inevitable outcome. If we really understand our need and God's amazing salvation to us, the outcome should be good works.

So that's the discussion that Paul has in verse eight, referring to how he's presented the gospel. But then you kind of switch over to verses nine to 11, and the other side of the picture comes in.

And here's where Paul revisits this issue of false leaders that he's talked about in the letter. These are people who just want to stir up controversy and division.

[10 : 22] These are people who promote superstitions and that performance-based religion. These things are essentially the opposite of good works.

And Paul says the people of God need to stay away from that. These things show that the false teachers have not actually understood and experienced the gospel, which is why Paul says they are actually self-condemned.

And that discipline process that Paul talks about in verses nine to 11, the heart behind that is not just to protect the family from false teaching, but it's actually to discipline those false teachers so that they would actually come to know the true gospel and not this false teaching.

And then when we turn to the last verses, verses 12 to 15 of this letter, Paul's conclusion includes some final instructions and greetings, things that you would typically see in a lot of his letters.

You know, there's a reference to Zenos the lawyer, or Zenest the lawyer, and that made me happy when I first read that because as a former lawyer myself, you know, I definitely wrestled with this fact that we sometimes lawyers have a bad rap.

[11 : 41] You know, they don't have the best reputation all the time. So seeing that, you know, preserved in Scripture, that there is a lawyer that can actually be good, you know, that is assuring to us, isn't it?

So think about that and really kind of, you know, just embrace that if you need that today, if there's any lawyers in here who need that. The point, though, the point that I want to really draw us to is in verse 14.

And I think this really encapsulates everything that this final section is about. Paul writes this, You notice something about that?

That parallel to verse 8 is unmistakable. Devote themselves to good works. And there's something so fundamentally important about these good works that Paul emphasizes it not once but twice at the end of his letter.

And I think we can see why he did that. You know, as we remember those six elements of salvation, good works is the evidence of salvation.

[13 : 10] It's what shows us. It's what shows the world that God is transforming our lives. It's what Jesus said in Matthew 5, verse 16.

Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. We sang that just now.

Shine your light and let the whole world see we're singing for the glory of the risen King. And Paul says in verse 8 that good works are excellent and profitable.

Here in verse 14, he states that devoting ourselves to good works means that we will not be unfruitful. Some other translations say unproductive.

So here's what it boils down to. Scripture says that good works are excellent. They are profitable. They are productive. And they are fruitful.

[14 : 11] And that's great, right? Who in here does not want to do works that are excellent and profitable and productive and fruitful, right?

If you don't, we can talk later and we can see why that is. But I would really think that we would all see those four words and say, yeah, I want my work, my life to be marked by those words.

So as we turn our attention to the idea of fruitfulness and the gospel today, let me share a story about a small church that I was involved in when I was younger, quite some years ago.

I'm older than I look. Leaders of this church, of this small church, they were wonderful people. They were loving people. They were imperfect people, people like me and you.

And they were faithful in preaching the gospel. They were faithful in loving each other. They were faithful in gathering week after week. And after starting out meeting in people's homes, kind of like house church style, they kind of grew out of that.

[15 : 22] They outgrew of that in size. And they started meeting in a local church building. And in terms of size, though, they never really grew past around 40 or so people gathering week to week.

And they were thoughtful. They were diligent. I was involved. I observed them. I volunteered as well. They were thoughtful. They were diligent in developing, you know, ideas, trying different things.

But the numbers pretty much plateaued, like around 40. And some people eventually left over the years, natural ebbs and flows of the church life.

And there were definitely seasons where it felt like the church was shrinking even. But this church still meets today. And there's still a solid core right there.

And when you hear just that little anecdote about my experience about this church, do the words excellence, profitable, productive, and fruitful jump into your mind?

[16 : 28] Are those the things that immediately kind of resonate with you? What if I told you a similar story but just kind of changed up the elements? You know, we're talking about a business.

We're talking about a board of directors. We're talking about revenue and losses and all those things. Would those words excellent, profitable, productive, and fruitful come to your mind?

When we look at the passage today, we realize that in order to properly understand the message of Titus, we need to have a biblical understanding of this connection between good works and fruitfulness.

So our outline today is very simple. We're going to look at the results-based perspective of fruitfulness. And then we're going to look at the biblical perspective on fruitfulness. And finally, hopefully, we can apply that in some way to our lives. Very simple. Results-based, the Bible and God's Word and application.

[17 : 37] So when we consider profitability, when we consider fruitfulness from a worldly perspective, you know, it's typically based on results.

And more specifically, quantifiable results. Things you can count, that you can tally, that you can put on a spreadsheet. Everyone loves a good spreadsheet that tells them good numbers, right? Positives, negatives. You can clearly measure things like the number of attendees, the income, the expenditure, the hours you have worked, the widgets you have manufactured.

You know, you can clearly look at the grades on your transcript, right? Students. And you can look at the university name that's printed on your transcript. And then you can go online and look at the ranking of that school, right?

If you're working, you can look at your salary slip. You can look at the title on your business card. You can look at the organization chart and see where you stand on that chart.

[18 : 39] You can look at the valuation of your company. And even in nonprofit, even in charities, you know, metrics are key to how we assess the benefit, the impact of our work.

And churches are no different. You know, we do look at Sunday attendance. We do measure all kinds of attendance. We do look at financial giving. We do look at the budget.

We look at the number of people baptized, even. And so there are endless, endless things that we can quantify and count in order to measure our results.

And let me be clear, I'm not saying that any of that is inherently bad. There's a lot of benefit we can get from counting and measuring, from having performance indicators that measure the results that we're achieving, including the church.

So by no means I'm not anti-numbers, anti-metrics. But here's the problem. There are several fundamental problems with Christians and people, I would say, in general.

[19 : 47] Problems with relying on results as the primary way of measuring the fruitfulness of our good works. Now, firstly, even in secular perspectives, there are plenty of skeptics and people expressing caution about using performance metrics.

A recent piece in Harvard Business Review talks about the various traps of performance measurement. It said this. There's this trap, this danger of putting your faith in numbers.

Here's a Harvard Business Review talking about faith. Putting your faith in numbers rather than something else. It means putting your weight, your reliance on numbers. Why? Because it increases the temptation of manipulating those numbers.

And I'm sure you can think about many examples. And I don't know, Wells Fargo comes to mind recently. There's also this trap, this temptation, that when your metrics might not actually reflect what is true growth and actual prosperity and advancement.

And as your company, as your organization evolves, those metrics actually might become outdated very quickly. So here's a Harvard Business Review saying that numbers, you have to be careful because they might not reflect true fruitfulness.

[21 : 13] There's also this trap, this tendency that you only measure against yourself. You become inward looking and you only measure against what you've done in the past, last year's numbers, the previous decade's numbers.

And what happens is, I think what we see here is, here is the key problem with relying on results. You can only consider your success in relation to something else.

You can only compare with how you did before or how someone else is doing. And therefore, all of your results is relative. You can only do it and feel like you've grown and achieved in comparison to something else.

And this doesn't just apply to business. You know, imagine in your life right now trying to use metrics for the Christian life. Did you give more money this year?

Did you attend Sunday service more? Did you spend more time reading the Bible? If so, how many more verses? How many more passages did you memorize? How many more minutes did you spend doing quiet time?

[22 : 25] Did you spend more time serving the poor? Did you spend less time watching porn? Did you get angry or impatient fewer times this year?

And you can go on and on and on. And I don't know if all of you have a spreadsheet that quantifies your Christian life. But I think that all of us are at least subconsciously aware of our performance as Christians.

Why? Because society demands it. Your workplace demands it. Your schools demand it. That culture has shaped us and told us that we need to measure our worth by performance.

And the more measurable, the more concrete, the more tangible those measurements are, the better. Again, I am not saying the numbers are bad.

Don't leave this service thing like, forget the numbers. I'm deleting all my Excel spreadsheets. It's not bad.

[23 : 28] And I think, can measuring results be useful and helpful? Absolutely. But here's the thing. The clearest indicator that results are not the main thing for the people of God is this.

Scripture, our passage today, describes a fundamentally different way of connecting good works and fruitfulness.

And that connection is captured in the word devotion. Verse 8, those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

And again, in verse 14, let our people learn to devote themselves to good works. And this is our second point today.

Biblical faithfulness is ultimately measured by one's devotion to good works, not the result of good works.

[24 : 37] Now, firstly, I want to make sure we understand and just make sure this is clear.

When I talk about devotion, I'm not talking about some kind of passive mediocrity. I'm not using the word devotion to mean that God just wants us, you know, to have a good heart in a negative sense. You know, I've thought that about myself sometimes to justify. It's like, God, I have a good heart. I'm trying to do, you know, to live for you. But there was like zero effort.

There was no perseverance. It's not about just us singing Kumbaya and feeling good about each other, you know, week after week. We're not, it's not about just relying on good intentions.

Instead of growing in competence and having this genuine, gritty zealotry, this passion to do our best for God. So it's not about that passive kind of mediocrity that we can so often use to justify our lack of effort.

[25 : 50] The Greek word translated as devotion in verses 8 and 14 is this word called *proistimi*.

Proistimi. Say it with me. *Proistimi*. One more time. *Proistimi*. Something like that. It's okay. And it's translated devotion.

But as I looked into this word, as I kind of dug into how it was used, man, it is multifaceted. It is a rich, it is a deep word.

And I was amazed at all the various definitions, how it's been translated into different words throughout Paul's letters. It's the same word translated manage.

Like how Christians are called to manage their households and take care of their children. It's translated rule over, like how elders and leaders are supposed to rule well in the church.

[26 : 53] And they're supposed to watch over the flock. It can also be defined as lead or guide or direct. You know, where we have this authoritative role in doing these good works.

It can be defined as being active in helping or aiding others. So that describes this supportive role that you have in encouraging others, in exhorting others to do good works.

It can be defined as strive, which I think beautifully captures the perseverance, that grit that you need when it comes to devoting yourself to good works.

Proisteme also carries this sense of being busy or making something your business. And can you imagine your life if you made good works your business?

Not in the sense of profiting, you know, financially from good works, but in the sense that you take this enterprise as seriously as you would take any business endeavor.

[28 : 00] And finally, this word devotion carries this sense of being preeminent. Like being ahead of others or being the first in something, preeminence.

And here's where I think it's actually quite appropriate to compare and say that Christians, we should be the most preeminent in doing good, in doing good for our society.

Why? Because the Christian understands that the evidence of our salvation is devotion to good works, not the results of those good works.

And because of that, Christians should be some of the most inventive, the most entrepreneurial, some of the most risk-taking leaders in the world. Because we're devoted to good works without fear of failure, without fear of obtaining the results that we or the world expect.

The Christians know that God measures them by proisteme, not by their results. And the Bible is full of stories of people whose lives were marked by proisteme.

[29 : 14] And yet, their lives were very different and had very different outcomes. And I think this just beautifully illustrates when we look at these narratives.

Try comparing the lives of Joseph of the Old Testament, you know, the technicolor coat guy, son of Jacob. Compare his life with John the Baptist in the New Testament.

You know, both gained the reputation of being righteous men. Genesis 39 explains how the Lord was with Joseph. He was bought by Potiphar when he was sold into slavery by his brothers.

And he was so competent, so upstanding, that Potiphar put him in charge of his whole house. Mark 6.20 says that King Herod feared John, knowing that he was righteous and holy, and he kept him safe.

Their devotion meant that both men resisted sexual evil throughout their lives. They stood up against it, both in their public and personal lives. Joseph went through years of suffering.

[30 : 24] He was thrown into jail, languishing in jail, being forgotten in jail. And he stayed devoted until he actually was brought out of there, and he was raised up to become the second in command of all of Egypt.

John the Baptist spent 29 years, the first 29 years of his life, preparing for his ministry. And then he spent the next year gloriously proclaiming the coming of the Messiah, preparing the way for the Lord.

And then something amazing, something striking happened. King Herod was so pleased by the dancing of this foxy lady in his court that he foolishly promises her to give her anything, up to half of his kingdom.

King Herod is so pleased by the way for the Lord.

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[32 : 16] King Herod was so pleased by the way for the Lord. Hebrews 11, that famous chapter on faith. Verse 34 tells us that through faith, some escaped the sword.

But verse 37 says, through faith, some were killed with the sword. Same input, same faith, radically different outcomes.

completely opposite. And that tells us that it was their faith that counted. And I would say likewise, when we look at this, it is our devotion to good works that counts as faithfulness.

I love the story of King Josiah. You can read it in 2 Kings 22-23. Go home and read it this week.

God's people have fallen into complete idolatry.

Ups and downs, and they have fallen so far that even the law of God has been lost. It's like the Bible being completely forgotten in this church today.

[33 : 20] No one even has a copy. And King Josiah, he ascends to this throne, and he finds the word of God, their scriptures, and he realizes how far they have fallen from what God has called them to be and who they are today, and he mourns that they have fallen away.

He seeks God, and the prophetess tells him, it's too late. The word of God, thus says the Lord, it's too late for you guys. You've passed the point of no return.

Your kingdom will be decimated. Your people will be exiled. But because you, Josiah, have been faithful, you have repented, you have mourned, I will spare you from seeing the devastation.

It'll be past your time. Now, if I was Josiah at this point, I don't know about you, but if I was Josiah, I would have been seriously tempted to just cruise for the rest of my life.

You know, enjoy the life of a king, right? And be resigned to the fact that God has already declared, he's decreed that there's nothing we can do. The kingdom is gonna be destroyed.

[34 : 23] But devotion, proistemi, and Josiah, and he doesn't do that. He calls all the people together to pledge themselves to God.

Again, they respond to him, and from there you read how he had these sweeping reforms throughout all of his kingdom, all with the knowledge that destruction was inevitable.

And indeed, as you continue reading, they're wiped out and exiled. The world looks at Josiah and says, what a waste.

Why did he even bother? Why didn't he just enjoy himself? But I think Josiah understood that fruitfulness is measured by your daily devotion to God.

And this, guys, church, this is good news for us. For those of us who are here today laboring under the expectations of the world, wondering if we'll succeed in our careers, wondering how our kids will turn out, wondering if they'll meet our expectations or the world's expectations, wondering if we'll ever even get married and have kids, or simply wondering if our lives will actually make a difference.

[35 : 45] Will our community group members actually grow? Will people come to know the Lord? Will that loved one finally repent and turn back to Jesus? Will this church actually grow and make a difference?

Well, God is telling us today, focus your eyes, focus your attention on your devotion. Devotion in that full biblical sense to keep learning, to keep trying, to keep persevering, and surrendering your results to God.

Scripture says a thousand years is like a day to God, so we can patiently trust and wait on him. For those of you in here, for those of us in here who have great results, this is a reminder for us not to feel guilty about your success, unless you have a real good reason to feel guilty about your success.

That's a separate thing. But don't feel guilty, but also do not look at your results and your success and say, that's evidence of godliness, because it's not.

Your devotion was the evidence. Proistemi is a reminder for Watermark, for our church family, to point each other, to point the world to the greatest example of devotion, Jesus Christ on the cross.

[37 : 12] Died and rose again to save helpless sinners like you and me. Yeah, the cross seemed like utter foolishness when it happened. Son of God dying in agony on the cross, separated from the Father until we realized that when he resurrected, he conquered sin and death.

And now we can have eternal life as God's beloved children. And now none of us need to be defined by results anymore because God achieved the one and greatest result that all of us need. And guys, this is true liberation. This is the freedom to look beyond our desire for results, beyond that empty desire for self-worth and validation.

You know, it says in verse 14, devote ourselves to help cases of urgent need. You know, we can actually look at a place like Ebenezer School, this place that we're meeting right now, and see that there are blind kids that need our help.

You know, I think the Spirit's been prompting me in these last months. Think about how I can serve these kids. I've been noticing blind people navigating the MTR, marveling at their fearlessness, their skill in rush hour.

[38 : 39] It's amazing. Open your eyes and see that next time. And I pray that we can explore that together as a church. And if for whatever reason we're unsuccessful in serving these kids, that's okay.

We can regroup. We can prepare differently. We can try different things. And we can really devote ourselves to this good work and whatever good work that God puts before us.

You know, for Christians and non-Christians alike, the gospel says that when you put your faith in Christ, you have eternal life and as a new creation. That in this lifetime, God will provide everything you need.

But he's showing you day by day that what you really need is a loving relationship with him. One that overflows into devotion. It's the truth that actually transforms lives.

I'm going to invite the band to come back and lead us in a couple songs. So feel free to just come on up. If the truth actually transforms us, the final question that remains is this.

[39 : 59] Is devotion, is proisteme enough for you? Is it enough that your life is defined by proisteme?

Even if the results, the outcomes come out and the world considers that as failure. You know, I struggle with this but I know the answer is yes.

Joseph, John, Josiah, Jesus would say a resounding yes. And I can see that small church plant that I was involved with.

I can see them faithfully gathering and I can believe in my heart that I saw devotion. I saw devotion. And though they are small, though they may not have achieved much from the world's perspective, they were fruitful and they are fruitful.

let's respond to God in worship. Let's respond to God and worship.