

TITUS 3:4 CBC 27.12.2020

Please read Titus 3:1-8 ...

Although this is a fallen world and we often see the worst of humanity, there's still a lot of kindness about. We've seen many examples this year as we've battled the Covid pandemic. And a great deal of kindness surfaces at Christmas. If you're hurting or grieving, you know that kindness shown to you by another person is a very precious thing.

What was the kindest thing God ever did? Perhaps you'd find that difficult to answer, but one 13th century theologian had a go. According to Meister Eckhart, "*The kindest thing God ever did was become incarnate.*" I wonder if you'd agree with his suggestion? There's some justification for it in Titus 3:4: "*When the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, He saved us ...*"

1. SEEING GOD'S KINDNESS

Paul isn't saying there was no kindness before Jesus was born, because God has always been kind. But His kindness became especially visible in Jesus. If you want to know God's love and kindness, don't look at nature – the signals from nature are ambiguous because this is a fallen world, where everything has been thrown out of kilter by sin. Look at what He has revealed in Christ, in whom He made Himself visible.

The gospel is not about a distant God lobbing down some sort of help. God graciously gives us Himself! God is the blessing of the gospel. God with us, accommodating Himself to our weakness by living a human life.

And what a life! This was kindness wrapped in flesh. Jesus was kind to a widow who'd lost her son ... to a woman who'd had a string of broken relationships ... to lepers who lived outside of society ... to crooked tax-collectors who'd been feathering their nest ... to over-confident disciples ... to the hungry and the helpless and the hopeless. The examples of His kindness are endless. Everyone found they mattered to Jesus, and that being with *this* God was like being at the best party imaginable. No wonder people crowded around Him, whether rich or poor, young or old, male or female, somebodies or nobodies. The kind Son of God took our flesh and loved us in our brokenness.

And it's not just that He lived a kind life (though He did) but even more, He died a kind death – so cruel to Him, but so kind to us. It was why He came: to be our champion – to take up our sin and guilt and shame which had defeated us and to carry it to the cross and there to put it to death forever.

Just think – our Lord Jesus Christ: He is the One through whom creation was brought into being. He's the One whose glory was glimpsed by Isaiah and it shook the temple! What would He do with such glory? Give it all up, to become a baby in an animal's feeding trough. To be mocked and vilified. To be beaten and punched and spat upon by common thugs. And finally to be nailed to a blood-soaked cross. Why would God's Son – our King – do this? Because He's a God full of loving-kindness – kindness for the weak, the weary, the wounded and the wicked.

And all that kindness and love and generosity – that’s what God has always been like. But now His kindness has appeared in His Son, born of the virgin Mary. And we can see His kindness unambiguously.

2. EXPERIENCING GOD’S KINDNESS

And we experience the fruit of this kindness when we turn to God in faith. We receive all that our Lord Jesus Christ won for us – all that’s summed up in the three words at the beginning of v.5: “*He saved us.*”

Why do we need saving? v.3 explains why: “*At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.*” That’s not a very flattering portrait of human nature. You might think, “*But what about all the kindness in the world?*” Well, it’s true that because we’re made in the image of God, we’re capable of great kindness. But because we’ve turned away from God and are fallen creatures, we’re also capable of a great deal of *unkindness*.

v.3 doesn’t describe ALL that we are, but it does describe what we ALL are to some degree (which we grudgingly admit whenever someone points out our fault and we say rather sulkily, “*Well, nobody’s perfect!*”).

That’s why we need rescue! God has to do something for us that we can’t do ourselves. And that something involved coming into the world in Christ to die in our place for our sin (as we’ve already seen).

But His kindness doesn’t stop there: (v.5) He saves us “*through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour.*”

God saves us not simply by forgiving us but by making us a new person. Not a *perfect* person, but a new person. If you’ve turned to God in faith, you know you’re not yet perfect. Your sin (and desires for sin) may be very noisy – constantly calling for your attention. But if we peeled away those superficial layers and got down to the bedrock of your life, we’d find there a new desire for the will of God. As Jim Packer puts it, God has put into your heart a desire, faint but real, that’s a copy of the desire that drove our Lord Jesus Christ. It’s a desire to do His will. And though you still have sinful desires, your deepest desire is to please God. You WANT to be free from sin, and you long for the day when you WILL be free from sin. God has moved into your life by His Spirit!

And He’s done this so that you can take hold of fellowship with God, and a future. That’s v.7: “*so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*” God’s plan for changing the world begins with changing people. The Holy Spirit makes us alive and new.

3. REFLECTING GOD’S KINDNESS

And to the extent that our hearts are changed by God’s kindness, we become givers, not takers. v.8 “*I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.*”

All through Titus there's a call for Christians to stand out – not by being awkward, but by doing good. Just as Jesus came into the world and was visibly good, but He's now in heaven and so He's invisible, so God calls on His people to be visibly good – to be His visible representatives. If Christ has come and His Spirit has transformed you, you can't be a spectator! Of course, we're not doing good to get *into* God's Kingdom, but to live it out. And you can do this in your home, in your street, your workplace.

Because Christmas has brought what the puritan pastor Richard Sibbes called “*a spreading goodness*” – a spreading kindness to the world. Isn't this what so many people are longing to see? We constantly hear calls for more kindness – but how will that happen? Only the gospel can change hearts. Titus gives us the secret of kindness: it's that God has shown kindness to us in Jesus Christ. Christmas is the key that unlocks kindness around the world.

And what will convince people of that? Ultimately, only the Holy Spirit can do that – but the means He so often uses is that people catch a glimpse of God's kindness in US. That would be my own testimony – it wasn't logical argument that drew me to Christ; it was kindness – His kindness, and His people's kindness.

Perhaps you saw God's kindness in someone and it led you to Christ. Go and do the same for someone else. The Christmas season gives you plenty of opportunities. So will the year ahead. Think it through for yourself: How can you be someone who serves the Lord Jesus – who served you – as his visible representative?

Because God has been kind to you in Christ, hasn't He? If you grasp vv.4-7 you'll always know that God is FOR you. In every situation you don't understand – God is for you. In every experience you'd rather not go through – God is for you.

That's the heart of Christmas – Jesus Christ, God's kindest gift to us all.

Prayer: Thank You, God our Father, for sending the Lord Jesus into a selfish world to save us. May Your kindness lead us to turn from sin in repentance; to turn towards you in faith; and to turn towards the world in acts of loving service by the power of Your Holy Spirit; for Your glory's sake. AMEN.

Take a moment to thank God for His kindness to you. And think of someone to whom could you show the loving kindness of Jesus today.