

February 27, 2011  
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

Titus 2:11-3:7

### Who is Jesus? Savior – Redeemer

Our reading today comes from Paul's letter to Titus. Unlike some of Paul's letters that we are more familiar with like Romans or Corinthians – this letter is written to an individual instead of a community – a church. In this letter Paul writes to Titus (duh) a faithful companion of Paul's – a man whose faith has been formed under Paul's teaching and instruction – a person whom Paul trusts – trusts enough to 'put in order' the local churches on the Island of Crete.

This letter is mostly instructional – there is information about elders and bishops – what the character of such leaders should be. There is information about the behavior of old women, old men, young men and slaves. And there is information about what it means to be transformed as God's people by the saving work of Jesus.

In our reading this morning we will see Paul's hope for people and communities that are different – people and communities (disciples) whose lives are beginning to reflect the life of Jesus.

**Prayer**

**Scripture Reading**

## Introduction

So we have been looking at who Jesus is these last couple weeks. We have affirmed with the church universal that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. (Yes?) We have confessed our heresy of confusing the humanity and divinity of Jesus – of making Jesus to be some super-man – or some lesser god. We have remembered what is at stake when we diminish either the humanity or the divinity of Jesus.

- If Jesus isn't fully human God cannot truly sympathize with us in our weakness.
- If Jesus isn't fully human – we cannot truly be in communion (relationship) with our God as Jesus was (that there will always be a barrier to prevent us from drawing close).
- It is to deny the value that God places on humanity.
- It means that God still remains inaccessible to us.
- What is at stake in Jesus' humanity is hope – hope for today and tomorrow. Hope that does not wait for some super hero to come and rescue us. Hope that is not dependent on something we as humans have not been given. But hope that this old world can change and be different – because we ourselves can change and be different. Hope that is found not in the power but hope that is found in the midst of human weakness – in humility – in concern for the other. Hope that is found in the person of Jesus.
- If Jesus isn't fully **divine** – then all we know about God – about who God is and how God acts – about the extent of God's love – and grace – and mercy – it is all subjective – it is only our best hopes mixed with our imagination – seasoned with a

bit of natural revelation. In Jesus – God is fully revealed to us – so that we might know...

- If Jesus isn't divine – then God didn't really give up something important – precious – valuable – in Jesus' human life and death. God's love is not self-giving.
- If Jesus isn't divine – then Jesus' can't forgive sins – he can't save us – he can't redeem us – he can't offer us life that is eternal. There is no power – there is no authority – no power or authority other than the power and authority that we have – that is given to us as human beings – the kind of power and authority that is limited and fleeting.

So what do we do with this? How do we bring together the two together in a way that faithfully maintains and helps us to understand the importance of the full humanity and the full divinity of Jesus? One way is for us to move from looking solely at the person of Christ and to look at the work of Christ. So this morning I want us to look at Jesus as Savior and Redeemer.

Before going any further let me offer us all a word of assurance. Alister McGrath in his Introduction to Theology talks about the continuous challenges of clarifying the relationship between the human and divine elements in the person of Jesus Christ. McGrath refers to the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) and the guiding principle that they set for sorting this conundrum out. He summarizes their position by saying:

*“Provided that it is recognized that Jesus Christ is both truly divine and truly human, the precise manner in which this is articulated or explored is not of fundamental importance.”*

**What does it mean to be saved?**

Here we go. To understand what it means when we say Jesus is our Savior (and that is what Paul repeatedly says to Titus) we have to look at what it means 'to save'. Now, already we are ready to raise our hands and to shout out – I know – I know. But bear with me as we explore the many different ways we use this word 'save'.

Sometimes we might say;

‘I saved some money for my vacation.’ – or – ‘I saved a piece of pie for later.’

To use 'save' in this way means to set aside.

We also might say:

“I saved an hour by going around Atlanta instead of through it.” – or – “He saved the game with his rebound at the buzzer.”

To use 'save' in this way means to make unnecessary or to keep from being lost.

We can use the word 'save' to convey the meaning of preventing or guarding something or someone against injury or loss.

“The new flood wall saved the town.”

Save also can mean to rescue or deliver from danger or harm.

“The doctor saved his life by doing bi-pass surgery.”

I think it is important to note that depending how we use the word – sometimes we are the one who is acting – like when we ‘save’ money. But there are other times when we are recipients of that saving work, “The doctor saved his life.” Sometimes this word conveys a sense of past, present or immediate action – “He saved the game with his rebound at the buzzer.” And sometimes it has future implications – “I am saving money for a vacation.”

Biblically, we might find most of these meanings of the word ‘saved’ in various places. In other words – the word ‘save’ – can mean lots of things. But most importantly and most powerfully – this word – ‘saved’ – refers to ‘rescue’ and it references bondage / slavery. It refers to God *saving* his people – *rescuing* them from slavery in Egypt – rescuing them from their enemies – rescuing them from themselves – from their own selfishness – their own sinfulness. It refers to God rescuing them from darkness and from death.

Paul is reminding Titus as he writes – exactly what God has done in bringing “salvation to all”. He reminds Titus and us that we have been redeemed (rescued at a price) in Jesus’ self giving – from all iniquity – all sin – all the ways we live that are contrary to our created purpose – contrary to the goodness.

Rescued from sin – which binds us in its own kind of slavery – we are free to live lives that have been transformed by this freedom – lives that are self-controlled, upright, godly – lives that are ready for every good work – obedient to the law of love.

There is a past, present, and future reality to this saving. It has happened and it is happening and it will happen. We have been saved – we are being saved – we will be saved.

Paul also reminds Titus of another ‘saving’ – A ‘saving’ that has for us a future reality to it. A saving that is from death and to eternal life.

### **Jesus as Savior**

Paul makes it quite clear to Titus and to us that this ‘saving’ – this ‘rescuing’ – comes from God in Jesus Christ.

*“He (our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ) it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity (sin)...”(v13b-14a) --- “...he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done...” (5a)*

It is in the humble power of Jesus’ humanity – his human life and death – that we are saved (‘he who gave himself’). This saving – this redeeming – the paying of the price – we talk about are always transactional in nature. A price is paid to settle a debt. A bond is paid to free a prisoner. A ransom is paid to free the captive. But Jesus’ life and death move us far beyond some kind of transactional exchange to satisfy a debt – it shows us a love – that transforms – that forgives and forgets debts.

It is the love of God – through which the offended party – reaches out to the offender. It is the love of God that acts in reconciling – repairing the woundedness – of sin. It is the love of God that forgives and forgets.

It is the love of God that frees us – saves us from the burden of the past wrongs/sin. (This doesn't mean that we don't sin or won't sin. Instead it frees us to live anew each day. It liberates us so that we can become that 'new creation' in Christ Jesus.)

### **So how does it work?**

It is Jesus divinity that makes effective this saving work. In our reading from Titus this morning we are reminded of Triune God – God who is Father, Son and Spirit – all at work making effective our salvation.

- It is the grace of the Father/Creator that begins this saving work.
- It is the self giving love of Jesus – his life and death – his willingness to empty himself out – to become human – that makes effective our salvation. Jesus becomes the mediator – the go between – between God and us and us and God. Jesus is able to mediate because of his divinity.
- It is the Holy Spirit poured out through Christ that cleans us from sin, transforms us in the present, seals upon us the gift of eternal life.

In other words it is through Christ divine nature that we find the power (the grace, mercy, and love) that can save us.

While at the same time it is through Jesus' full humanity that we can 'see' what salvation looks like. In Jesus' humanity we go to the cross with him so that we too might be 'dead to sin and alive to all that is good.' (Rom. 6:11)

In Jesus we know what it means to live as we were created to live – in goodness of God's created purpose – but we see what it looks like. In Jesus we see love – we see grace – we see compassion – kindness – generosity – and because Jesus is us (human) – we know that we too can live as Jesus lived.

In Jesus' resurrection we can see what salvation looks like. Jesus says as he appears to the disciples – look at my hands – look at my feet – touch my side. In Jesus' resurrection we get a glimpse of our own resurrection – our own eternal life.

### **So What?**

So what? In Jesus Christ – by his divine self – through his human self – you and I have already been saved. Saved – rescued from the bondage of sin. Saved – given the gift of life that is eternal. Therefore we need not be anxious about the past, the present, or the future. Therefore – justified (made right) by grace – renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit – we can live as God created us to – good. Amen.