

Titus 2:11-14

Christmas Eve, December 24, 2017

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. It trains us to reject ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, that is, the glorious appearance of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are his own chosen people, eager to do good works.

Theme: The grace of God has appeared
I. Jesus has delivered all people from sin
II. Jesus makes us eager to do good works

INJ You have listened to God's Word deliver a message that is strikingly different from the daily news cycle. God announced the birth of the Savior. He proclaims sin forgiven. You have peace with him! God's people rejoice. On the other hand, TV and internet news tells us about people struggling to survive, disastrous accidents, terrorism and the dangers of whatever politics you don't like. No one has joy, it seems. Only bitterness and anger. I hope the media doesn't dictate your happiness.

It isn't easy to be cheerful, though. Survey your life: Your health isn't so great. You argued again. Stress. Frustration. Feeling trapped. How can God be – how can Christians be – cheerful? How can we sing songs of joy tonight when real problems suck the joy right out of our life?

Because of the real problems in our lives we gather around God's Word. We don't cover up or ignore what is ugly and painful and hard, but we face it head on. We remember what God said about reality. The biggest problems we face are spiritual ones: sin, guilt, death. God's solution is for every person no matter the situation. "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people." God's grace is found in the person of Jesus, the baby in a manger, whom we worship tonight. "He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are his own chosen people, eager to do good works."

The lawlessness Paul talks about is easy to see. The world is so messed up! But, if we care to look, that lawlessness is even inside our heart.

Sometimes we are so eager to indulge in the world's depravity! We make our life so bumpy! But the problem lies deeper. Because of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden, we were born enemies of God. Because of our sinful nature, we constantly think and do wicked things. We deserve God's judgment: death and punishment forever in hell. That's our real problem!

God proclaims the solution: "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people." Born in a manger, Jesus came in humility to do away with our wickedness. God's grace is that Jesus' perfect life stands as righteousness for us. Sinners are clothed in his perfection. Jesus' brutal death on the cross paid our debt. His blood cleansed the guilty from their stain. Grace appeared – God's undeserved love for sinners. Instead of the judgment of death, Jesus declares holy and gives life.

The clear water of baptism called us personally into God's family. The powerful word of God connected with simple water turned a rebellious heart into a trusting one. That wasn't the end, but just the beginning. Through the word regularly proclaimed and heard and learned, God keeps faith alive and nurtures it so it matures and grows. God's grace is totally undeserved and totally free. Our God saves us only by his grace.

Grace appears in muted glory at Christmas. The details are well-known and beloved. A manger because there was no room for them in the inn. Shepherds terrified at the glory of the Lord, but rushing to see "Good news of great joy, which will be for all people: Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord." Mary pondered all these things in her heart.

The message given through all those details is simply grace. Here is the connection between the peace of Christmas and the chaos of life: Your sins are forgiven. That's it. No small print, no hidden catch, no "gotcha!" The grace of God has appeared. With sins fully and freely forgiven, our lives cannot remain the same. Jesus makes us eager to do good works.

"The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. It trains us to reject ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age." The world tempts us with all sorts of things that are bright and colorful, flashy and funny. Advertisers want us to try their product, and we will love it. Satan works that way, too. Only he is selling emptiness. He deals in guilt and deception, lies and broken promises. How Adam and Eve must have wished they had rejected the serpent in the Garden of Eden! How often we wish we had rejected ungodliness and worldly passions.

There is more to rejection than just saying no. The words need to

have some power behind them. Some determination and force to sustain the vocabulary. We don't have that kind of strength. Jesus does. He was perfectly obedient to God for us. He overcame sin for us by his death. He rose again to declare Satan is done for. Jesus has the power we need!

He trains us in his power and strength through the gospel word. To overcome those persistent temptations, you need time spent reading and hearing and pondering God's Word. Time in church where God feeds and fills your heart. Time at home to grow and understand. Time with brothers and sisters in Christ to become more confident. Time in God's Word trains us to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives. The grace of God has appeared and makes us eager to do good works.

Consider yourself in training. Training for a Christian faith and a Christian life takes time and dedication and a consistent routine with God's Word. By it, God fills us with self-control. He leads us to good choices. The sinner who has been forgiven is thankful. We overflow with joy as we marvel at God's grace!

That is who you are: joyful, eager, self-controlled, upright and godly. I know it doesn't always look like that. Life gets messy, and that is why we keep coming back here, back to the word, back to the manger, and back to the cross. Back to the empty tomb. The grace of God has appeared. Jesus has delivered us from sin. By his gospel word God trains us, making us eager to do good works. Let us live upright and godly lives in thankfulness for God's grace!

There is a purpose and a goal for such praiseworthy living. It is not to earn a better spot in heaven. Jesus has already given us the best seats in the house! But we wait for "the blessed hope, that is, the glorious appearance of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." He came once in a humble cattle stall, wrapped in swaddling clothes. He will come again in glory, and all the world will see him. We will see the glorious appearance of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Glory awaits all who trust in him. The grace of God has appeared! Christmas is a regular reminder that grace will appear again on that last day.

Until then we deal with those drastically different images of life. In the one, we live with our eyes focused on Jesus. We have peace and joy and eagerness and self-control. In the other image, we get distracted and preoccupied with ourselves. We endure grief and regret and sin and sorrow. Tonight God straightens things out. Jesus has delivered you from sin. He makes you eager to do good works. God's message to you is unlike anything you hear anywhere else. Don't you want to hear it often? The grace of God has appeared. Christ your Savior is born! SDG Amen.