

I was in the 6th grade when Halley's Comet appeared in the night skies over my hometown. That was back in 1986. I wonder who remembers it?

It was a big thing. If you haven't heard of it before, Halley's Comet is this beautiful comet that is visible from earth every 75 years or so. It's special because you can see it with the naked eye - you don't need a telescope when it is close to earth. It is visible for a number of months, and so there were lots of chances to try and see the comet. I remember standing out in the nighttime in my pajamas looking up to the sky in wonder...

Halley's Comet is also special because it only appears once every 75 years or so. There are historical records of Halley's Comet as far back as 466BC from the Greek historian Pliny the Elder, and also from Chinese records in the same year. The Babylonians recorded Halley's appearance in 164BC and 87BC.

That means the comet also appeared in approximately 12BC, leading some people to speculate on whether the star that the wise men followed was in fact Halley's Comet. I'll leave it up to you to decide on that...

But for a 10 year old in 1986, Halley's Comet was big news. We learned about it in class, we did projects on it, we made artworks about it, we wrote stories about it. And when the comet finally disappeared from the sky, my 10 year old classmates and I wondered if we would see it again. If my math is correct, I should see Halley's Comet again if I live to the age of 85...

Now the appearance of Halley's Comet is a significant event in history. But our Bible passage today points to an event of even greater significance to world history – the appearance of Jesus in the past, and the return of Jesus sometime in the future. We live between those two appearances of Jesus, and that ought to shape how we live our lives. To find out how, stick around as we open the Bible together in just a moment.

INTRO

Well good morning. My name is Dan Bidwell, Senior Pastor at Yountville Community Church. It is great to be back with you this morning as we set aside time to worship our loving God, to hear from his word, and to come to him in prayer.

Because this is not just a Youtube channel. This is our church. This is your church. And if you're listening or watching right now, we are church together, across the Napa Valley and beyond, by

faith and by the power of the Holy Spirit as he unites us in Christ to bring us into the presence of our loving heavenly Father.

So we would love to know that you've been at church this morning. We'd love everyone to fill out a Connect Card online – you can do that at our website www.yountvillechurch.org. Let us know what God is teaching you, how you're growing, or how we can pray for you. It is our joy to pray on your behalf, so please reach out and share the journey with us.

Speaking of journeys, our church has been on a journey over the last few years of rebuilding. We are rebuilding our historic chapel in Yountville, rebuilding our theater and our kids church spaces, our outdoor areas. But the reconstruction is not just physical. We are praying, under God, that he would rebuild us as a church family in the coming months and years, as we welcome old members and new alike to be part of what God is doing in the Napa Valley.

So please pray for us. Please pray with us. And if you're nearby, consider joining us as we reopen in person very soon.

For those of you who are financial supporters of our mission, thank you for making it possible for us to continue ***sharing the hope of Jesus in the Napa Valley and beyond***. We can't do it without you, and I thank God for the generosity he is growing amongst us. If you'd like more details about how to contribute, you can go to the Give tab on our website, again www.yountvillechurch.org. That's also where you can sign up to our newsletters to stay on top of all the church news.

But for now, why don't we turn our hearts to prayer as we get ready to open the Bible.

Our Father, we thank you for your word, for the way that you speak to us through the pages of the Bible. We ask you to speak to our hearts today, to teach us the amazing truths of your gospel, to soften us and shape us and mold us to be more like Jesus. Father, would you use these precious moments to draw us near to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

INTER

Just to remind you where we are up to in the Bible. We are right in the middle of our series from the book of Titus. It's actually a letter from the Apostle Paul written to his young protégé, Titus, whom he had left in charge of the churches on Crete. In it, Paul lays out his blueprints for a healthy church.

And so we've seen Paul's core values for a church; his blueprint for church leadership; his blueprint for the way that generations should relate to one another; his blueprint for how Christians ought to act in society and at work. It's all about godliness, because our godliness commends the gospel to a world that is without God.

But here's the thing. What if you listen to that list of instructions, and it sounds like Christianity is just about doing good things? Following the rules. If that were true, then wouldn't it be enough just to be a good person? Why would we need Jesus? Couldn't we just get on with doing good things, and forget about religion altogether?

Because that's the misunderstanding that lots of people have when they talk about Christianity. I'm a good person, they say. Isn't that enough?

Glory

Well there are two words in our passage today that remind us why Christianity is about more than just being a good person. The first word is **glory**... I want you to listen for it as I read Titus 2:11-14.

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the **glory** of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11-14)

Titus 2:13 says that our blessed hope is *'the appearing of the **glory** of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.'*

God's glory in the Old Testament is a way of describing God's presence when he was with his people. God's people already understood the concept from the time of the Exodus, when God had led them out of Egypt in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night.

But the link between the cloud and God's glory is made explicit when God summons Moses goes up on Mount Sinai to meet with him.

¹⁵ When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, ¹⁶ and **the glory of the Lord** settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. ¹⁷ To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. (Exodus 24:15-17)

There is something both comforting and terrifying about the glory of the Lord. God was visibly present to his people. And yet his holiness, his perfection, his absolute goodness make him so very different from us – like a consuming fire. God had instructed the people that they mustn't approach the mountain or touch it, and that they would die if they did (Exodus 19:12). A few chapters later, when God agreed to show Moses his glory, God said that no one may see his face and live (Exodus 34:20).

The prophet Isaiah had a similar experience of God when he has a vision of being brought to the throne room of God (in Isaiah 6). Isaiah is struck with terror because he knows that he is ‘*a man of unclean lips.*’ He knows that he has no right to stand before the holiness of the Almighty, his sin is too much, even though he is a prophet and a religious man. When Isaiah experiences the glory of the presence of the Lord, he is terrified.

And that idea of the terrifying holiness of the Lord persists in the Old Testament. God’s people are not permitted to enter his presence casually. If they did, they would die, like the man who reached out and touched the Ark of the Covenant when the oxen stumbled (2 Samuel 6:6-7). The Lord Almighty is not to be taken lightly... The fact that God’s presence remained behind the curtain of the temple teaches us that as sinful people, we need to treat God with appropriate reverence and fear.

So come back to Titus 2 with me. Paul says that our blessed hope is the appearing of the glory of the Lord. How is our greatest hope the appearing of the one who ought to strike terror in us?

Grace

The answer is in the second word we need to recognize from Titus 2 – that is, ***grace***.

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. (Titus 2:11)

As much as God is glorious, as much as he is holy, as much as he is the judge of heaven and earth, our God is also gracious and merciful. Rather than treating us as our sins deserve, he offers us salvation instead.

Like Halley’s comet appearing in the night sky, God’s salvation appeared in a way that everyone could see and understand, when God’s own son Jesus came to die for us.

And that’s where we need to notice that little detail about God’s glory in Titus 2:13. Did you notice it?

the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13)

God’s glory is most fully revealed ***not*** in a pillar of cloud, ***not*** in a consuming fire, ***not*** in lightning striking out to kill us when we do something wrong. God’s glory is most fully revealed in the appearance of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1 teaches us that:

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being (Hebrews 1:3)

Jesus comes to reveal God to us – God’s character, God’s nature, God’s plan for salvation, God’s great love and mercy. Not judgment, but the offer of forgiveness, if we turn our hearts back to God.

One of the hardest things to talk about as a preacher is sin. It’s not a popular word in a culture that defines its own morality, in a culture where we decide in community which behaviors are acceptable and which aren’t. It’s difficult to talk about sin because people don’t want to acknowledge the existence of God, and his claim over our lives. It’s hard to talk about sin because we worry that God will spoil our fun.

But sin explains the profound brokenness in our world. It explains why people hurt one another, why we hurt the ones we love, why we find ourselves saying and doing things that we know aren’t good for us. We all want to say that we’re trying to do good, and to be good. But are we really?

If you found yourself standing before the God of the universe, would you really be able to say you had lived a good life? Would you have that confidence?

I wouldn’t.

And if we had to stand before God on our own merit, then God have mercy...

PAUSE

The good news of our passage, and the good news of Christianity is that God **does** have mercy. Jesus appeared to bring God’s grace and to offer salvation to all people. Jesus offers to deal with our sin and this is how:

Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ ~~who~~ gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own (Titus 2:13-14)

First Jesus **redeems** us – this is a word that comes from slavery. Slavery was a common practice in Ancient Near East cultures. Slave traders would buy and sell men and women and children as property, sadly a practice that continues today in many different ways. Praise God there are agencies around the world seeking to free victims of human trafficking, and that’s something we should get behind.

But the original agency for freeing people from slavery was God. In Titus 2:14 Paul teaches us that God has released us from our slavery to sin, by purchasing our freedom.

God pays the ransom to redeem us from our wickedness, to redeem us from the mistakes we’ve made, and the wrong we’ve done. He redeems us even from the hurts we’ve deliberately inflicted on others.

And rather than making us stand in the dock to receive the sentence we deserve, Jesus pays the price so that we can go free. The price is his body, given for ours. His death instead of our own. The righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God (1 Peter 3:18).

I just want to pause on that idea for a moment, because if we don't understand the peril we were in because of our sin, then we can never understand the grace of God to redeem us from it. There is a beautiful line in Amazing Grace, written by John Newton, a former slave trader himself, which says:

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind but now I see

As humans, we have an incredible propensity for self-deception. We are blind to the way we really are. God opened John Newton's eyes to see what a wretch he was – not just for his participation in the slave trade, but for all the wrong he had done in life. And as you hear God's word today, I pray that God will open your eyes afresh to the reality of your sinfulness, but also to the reality of God's overwhelming grace towards you.

Because this passage isn't meant to leave us with guilt. It's meant to focus us on our blessed hope, and the eager expectation of the return of Christ. We don't fear the coming judgment because Jesus has removed our guilt. He has purified us, as it says in **Titus 2:14 [ON SCREEN as quoted above]**.

He has washed us clean from our shame, he has washed us clean from impurity. We don't need to hold onto the baggage of our bad choices, we don't need to keep beating ourselves up for what we've done. We don't need to wear our sin as something that identifies us any longer. Yes, we may still have to deal with the mess we've caused, but Jesus sets free from the guilt and shame that can weigh us down like an anchor.

Jesus gives us a fresh start, and a fresh identity, counted as members of his very own people. Elsewhere the Bible talks about our adoption into Christ's family, being chosen and elected, and predestined and sanctified and set on the path to glory as we are raised with Christ in the heavens.

We were headed down the path of destruction, and instead in Jesus Christ, God has given us a completely different future.

I grew up with a lot of South African neighbors in the 1990s. Many had emigrated from South Africa because of Apartheid and the mess that the government had made of the country, and I remember our neighbor speaking about the atrocities he witnessed and was forced to commit during his own National Service.

Thank God, Apartheid finally ended in the 1990s, and under Nelson Mandela's leadership, the country sought a way forward towards reconciliation. Part of the process was bringing victims of apartheid-sponsored violence into contact with the perpetrators (called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission).

A case came to the Commission of a woman whose 18 year old son had been arrested by a particular police officer, a Mr Van de Broek. The woman's son was subsequently shot and his body burned to ashes while the officers stood by drinking. Eight years later, the same police officer arrested her husband, and held him for 24 hours.

Then in the dead of night, the officers had burst in and dragged the old woman out of bed. They brought her to a lonely rivers edge where her husband lay tied to a pile of wood, still alive. As she watched, the officers doused the man with petrol and then ignited a fire. The last words her husband spoke to her, in the midst of the blazing fire, were, "Forgive them."

Years later, the old woman, now blind, finds herself in the court room across from the officer who stole her family from her. He confesses to everything he had done.

The chairperson of the Commission turned to the woman. "Before the Commission determines an appropriate punishment for these crimes, you have the opportunity to make a final statement regarding sentencing. Is there anything you would like to say?"

[Pause]

"I want three things," the woman said calmly. "Firstly, I want Mr. Van de Broek to take me to the place where they burned my husband's body. I would like to gather up the dust and give him a decent burial.

"Second, Mr. Van de Broek took all my family away from me, so I still have a lot of love to give. Twice a month, I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him."

"Third, I would like Mr. Van de Broek to know that he is forgiven by God, and that I forgive him, too. And, I would like someone to come and lead me by the hand to where Mr. Van de Broek is so that I can embrace him and he can know my forgiveness is real."

As the elderly woman made her way across the silent courtroom, Van de Broek reportedly fainted, overcome by emotion. And then the silence was broken when someone began singing, "Amazing Grace."

Each of us has sat in the same place as that police officer. Or we will one day. On that day the glory of the Lord will be terrifying to those who stand accused. But for those of us who have come to Jesus, we look forward to hearing those precious words – you are forgiven – and to feeling the embrace of Jesus so that we know his forgiveness is real.

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch; like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

Will you pray with me?