

**Titus 3:3-7**  
**God Saved Us**

- 1. Because of his mercy**
  - 2. Through the washing of rebirth**
  - 3. So that we might become heirs**
- January 10, 2016**

*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. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might [better, "have"] become heirs having the hope of eternal life."*

When I was a pastor at a church in Ohio, we had a church sign which had a space for messages. I don't miss that sign. There are a couple reasons for that.

I don't miss it because each week in the winter I'd have to walk out across the lawn through a foot of snow and take down the previous week's letters. Of course the constant sleet of northeast Ohio had usually frozen the letters to the sign, so I had to stand there in the cold, hit the letters one by one--hard enough to dislodge them from the ice—but not so hard as to break the sign.

(Even if I felt sometimes like just breaking the sign...)

The other reason I don't miss that sign is because I had to come up with something new each week (for both sides of the sign!). On one side I would always list the sermon theme. So I'd try to come up with something intriguing—something that would make people say, "I wonder what that means. I think I'll go to that church this Sunday!"

I'd put something on there like "God's Battle Plan for Life" (and then add an exclamation point to make it more exciting) or "Minding God's D's and Q's." (Don't try to figure out what that one was about. I just made it up.) I certainly wouldn't have come up with anything like today's theme: God Saved Us.

I doubt that theme made your eyes suddenly widen with excitement, and I doubt that it made you scratch your head with a puzzled intrigue.

"God Saved Us"—Tell us something we don't know, Preacher.

And yet "God saved us" is exactly what Paul told Titus in our reading for this morning.

### **1. Because of his mercy**

I hope that everyone here today would admit that they have at times been "foolish" and "disobedient." I hope no one here would claim that they've never disobeyed one of God's commands. Only a fool would attempt to deny that.

We'd probably even admit that at times we have "lived in malice and envy...hating one another."

Who of us wouldn't admit that yes, there are times we've messed up?

But "messing up" isn't really a good way of describing what we've done. To live in malice and envy is not a weakness. To spitefully, maliciously talk about someone behind their back because of what they've done to us—that's not "a weakness." To envy the good fortune of our neighbor is not "just a natural human reaction to the inequities of life."

It is sin. It is damnable. It makes us deserving of an eternity in Hell.

Wow, that's a tough pill to swallow, isn't it? But if we're honest with ourselves, there's no way around it, so yes, we'll admit that we're sinners.

But admitting that you're a sinner isn't the same as admitting that you need saving. Admitting that I've "messed up" isn't the same as admitting that I've ruined things beyond my ability to fix them.

That's because, as we are by nature, we have no ability to even begin to fix things. That's because, as we are by nature, we are—in the words of Paul—"enslaved." We may think that we have control of these things, but the fact is that they have control of us. And therefore we are slaves who need someone else to save us, to free us.

Now I know you know the answer--it's right there in the sermon theme. But it's possible that we've gotten so used to those words that we've forgotten how utterly illogical they are. Yes, God saved us--but why on earth (or why in heaven?) would he go to the trouble of doing so?

What motivated him?

We'd like to think that it had at least **something** to do with us. I'd like to think that God looked at me, a bad person, and was able to see a good person trying to get out. We'd like to think that God showed his kindness and love to us because within us there was a fraction of us that was lovable--or at least that within us there was something which had the potential of being lovable.

But no.

The picture Paul painted of us in the first verse of our reading didn't portray people who were occasionally dabbling in malice, envy, and lust. It portrayed people who were immersed in it. Paul says that we **lived** in it. And the fact is, that's how we were from the moment we were born. On our own, we never had--and we never would have had--anything to make us deserving of his kindness and love.

As Paul says, then, God did not save us because of righteous things that we had done--and in fact, God did not save us because of righteous things that we might have **eventually** done, for the Bible indicates that it is not possible for someone who does not have faith in God to do anything which pleases him.

So then why did God do this? Because of his mercy. Probably the closest thing we have in the English language to a synonym for "mercy" is "pity." God looked at us, he saw people in need of saving--and yet completely unworthy of saving--and he pitied us.

I can't explain to you why he pitied us, why he loved us. Our helplessness in no way contributed to our lovability. An innocent person trapped in a speeding car that's headed for the edge of a cliff--their helplessness makes them pitiable, and they're worth saving. But the person who has stolen that car from a senior citizen and is heading for that cliff because they are attempting to escape the police--their helplessness doesn't make them pitiable. They're just going to get what they deserve. Generally speaking, most people are not going to be interested in saving such a person.

God saw us—people who were just like that, people who were driving full speed towards Hell, driving full speed away from God—and instead of letting us have what we deserve, God saved us. Why? Because of his great mercy.

## 2. Through the washing of rebirth

And how did he save us, how did the "kindness and love of God our Savior appear"? In the person of his Son. As we saw a few weeks ago, Jesus, God's Son, appeared at Christmas. He was born a man for the purpose of saving us. As we will see starting next month when the season of Lent begins, he did that by paying for our sins with his life.

But God's revelation of his kindness and love did not stop there. He went still further in order to be sure that he saved you.

Picture God as a hostess at a party. If a hostess at a party sets out a tray of hors d'oeuvres, a convincing argument could be made that she's taken care of the guests. And if that hostess makes an announcement to the entire group that there are hors d'oeuvres on the coffee table and they are welcome to help themselves, she has certainly done her part to feed her guests. If the guests are too foolish to go over there and feed themselves, no one could argue that it is the fault of the hostess!

So if God prepares forgiveness for us through Jesus and then even goes so far as to announce it in the Bible, that should certainly be enough to take care of us. If we are too spiritually stubborn or slothful to go over there and take the forgiveness, that's not God's fault, is it?

But we weren't merely stubborn or slothful. The Bible describes us as both hostile and dead. That is, we were both unwilling and unable to take the forgiveness that was offered.

So God has made sure that we were saved. Paul says, *"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously."*

In the dinner party illustration, perhaps a hostess might decide that she should go to each individual guest and tell them that the hors d'oeuvres are on the table, and that the guest should go and get some. After all, perhaps one of the guests might reason that those are only for certain people.

Likewise, God has come to us individually with his announcement of forgiveness. He comes to us in baptism and says, as he did to Jesus in our gospel reading, "You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased. Yes, you. You, the one who has sinned against me greatly--I'm well pleased with you because Jesus has taken away **your** sins."

But suppose there were a guest who still didn't take the food when the hostess offered it directly to them. This strains believability because very few people would actually go to this sort of trouble, but it is possible that the host could actually go to the hors d'oeuvres, fill a plate with them, go back to the guest, and actually place it into their hands.

I say that it strains believability, and yet this is how God saved us in baptism. God looked at us and he saw people who were dead. So not only did he come directly to us in baptism and assure us that we are his children, but he also came to us with his Holy Spirit. That Holy Spirit used the Word of God in baptism and worked faith in our hearts. He actually put that forgiveness right into your hands.

I don't know how it works. Whenever I've baptized a baby, they looked the same after the baptism as they had before. Nor do they seem to act any differently, either. But I **believe** it works. Our reading tells us that when the washing of baptism takes place, there is a rebirth. What has been dead is made alive. What has been damned has been saved.

That is how God made sure that you as an individual were saved. **How** did God save us? Paul says, *"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously."*

And so it is that we became alive.

### **3. That we might become heirs**

And because we have been reborn, because by faith we have received God's forgiveness, the last part of God's plan for saving us has been fulfilled. Paul says God saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit so that, *"having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."*

That last phrase sounds a bit uncertain, doesn't it--"heirs having the hope of eternal life."

But let's not focus on the word "hope" for the time being. Rather let's focus on the word "heir." If you are someone's heir, that means you are written into their will. Now so long as you are written into their will, are you wondering about whether or not you will get a share of the inheritance? Of course not! The words are written right there in the will. You are an heir!

The only way in which it could be said that you're "hoping" is in the sense that you are looking forward to receiving the things that have been promised you--because you haven't taken physical possession of them yet.

But as for uncertainty, there's none. The words are clear.

As heirs of eternal life, our "hope" is the same. The words God has spoken to us are clear. When the Bible tells us that God has reconciled **the world** unto himself, the promise is clear. When the Bible tells us that baptism saves us, the promise is clear. We have forgiveness of sins. We are heirs. Our reward is eternal life.

And so we hope. We enjoy living in God's grace right now. We rejoice in knowing that we are God's children, and that we have been ever since we first came to faith--for most of us, at our baptism. And we rejoice in knowing that God isn't suddenly going to change his mind and write us out of his will.

But we also hope. We also look forward. We look forward to having **everything** that comes with eternal life. We look forward to heaven, when we will fully be in God's presence, a time when there will be no more sorrow, no more malice and envy and hate.

But we can begin living as heirs right now. As heirs of heaven, we can eliminate those things from our hearts now. As heirs, we are no longer slaves to malice and envy and hatred. As heirs who have been reborn in Christ--not as slaves to sin but as heirs freed to worship the God who has saved us--we are able to reflect his kindness and his love to others.

Why? Because God has saved us. He has saved us because of his great mercy. He has saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. He has saved us so that we would be heirs with the sure hope of eternal life.

God saved us! It's a pretty great theme--for a sermon, and for your life! Amen.