

Community Church of Issaquah
Sunday, October 20, 2024

Behaving as Christians
A Message by Rev. Vincent Lachina

It's a stranger thing to me, our reading Scripture and sometimes know so little about who wrote it or who those mentioned in the passages are. Want an example? What if we were reading from the book of Philemon, would you know who that was or anything about his place in the early church? Or maybe we would read from the book of Micah in the Old Testament. Is he familiar to you? This is intended to embarrass anyone or place anyone in an awkward position. This is simply what is the reality of most of us as we read or listen to verses from a book in the Bible that may or may not have meaning for us.

Today's Scripture passages were or are from the book of Titus. Here is another example of our hearing the verses from a book bearing the name of someone we might not know much about. Let me give you a bit of history as we begin our message today. The book of Titus was not written by the man named Titus. It was written as a letter to him from someone we all know very well – Paul. So, who was the person named Titus?

Paul the apostle often had someone with him as he traveled in what we call his missionary journeys. Perhaps the most commonly known of those companions was a young man named Timothy. We do not know how Paul met Timothy, nor how old he was. We do know that Timothy was half

Greek and that at some time in their relationship, Paul pushed Timothy to experience circumcision. This is a very strange reality because part of Paul constant preaching to the Jewish converted believers was that they did not need to be circumcised. So, Paul's choice to circumcise Timothy would suggest that he had a pragmatic side. He did not require his disciples to be circumcised, but if the situation called for working among the Jews and it made things easier, Paul would give in to it. It was Timothy that Paul used as his messenger to travel back to churches of believers in places Paul had preached and converted.

So, who was the other disciple that Paul mentored and sent on missions on his behalf? A very young man named Titus. He was one of at least these two young men that Paul disciplined and even described as his "son in the faith that we share." That was in the verses that were read for you today. Titus and Timothy both served as Paul's messengers and traveling companions, and both went on to lead churches that had been formed earlier. As part of his mentoring for these two young men, Paul advised them in his own letters to them about their next steps as disciples.

What we know about Titus is simple. He was a Gentile and at some point, was converted to be a believer in Jesus Christ, likely by Paul. We know in Paul's letter to the church in Galatia that Titus was never circumcised. Titus likely served as Paul's secretary and interpreter. He even accompanied Paul to Jerusalem to speak to the council there concerning the Mosaic rites that Paul wished to discontinue, especially circumcision. Later, Paul sent Titus to Corinth with the mission of remedy the huge fallout that

took place after Timothy had taken Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul's authority had been challenged by some, and he wanted to "fix" that.

Titus served as the courier for what we know as the "Severe Letter" which we know as 2 Corinthians. After Titus had completed his mission and the situation eased, he went on to meet Paul in Macedonia where Paul was overjoyed at how well Titus had eased the complicated issues of Corinth. Titus returned to Corinth with a larger entourage of followers and delivered the second letter from Paul to the churches in Corinth. A bit later, Paul joined Titus in Corinth. Because of his incredible work, Paul held Titus in the highest esteem and trusted him deeply. Titus became a troubleshooter, peacemaker, administrator and missionary.

After his later release from this first imprisonment in Rome, Paul journeyed to the island of Crete to preach the message of Christ. He called Titus to join him there. As rewards for his work, Paul appointed Titus as the bishop who would be entrusted with soliciting and establishing the leadership of the churches Paul had created. It is that position that leads Paul to write this letter to Titus with instructions about two things – the requirements of someone who would become an elder or leader in the church and the conduct expected of those in the congregation.

That will be the subject of this message after your history lesson has been completed. But before I dive into that, let me add some closure to the biographical information about

Titus. Following his work in Crete, Titus journeyed to the Roman province of Dalmatia where it is assumed he died, though that cannot be verified. It is believed that he did start a church there in the city of Salona and died in the year 65 AD, indicating he was still young at the time.

Now on to the work he did in Crete. In the first 9 verses of Titus, chapter one, Paul gives some specific qualifications for those who would be selected as leaders in the church. It's hard for me to consider the reaction of the believers in these churches in Crete (a Greek Island, by the way) when a young man comes in and says, "Hi, I'm Titus. Paul sent me to get you organized." It seems possible that they would be a bit skeptical until Titus receives Paul's letter and shares it with the converts.

What are the required qualifications of an appointed elder?

Let me give you the list:

- ❖ He must be blameless
- ❖ He must be faithful to his wife
- ❖ His children must be believers and not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient
- ❖ He must not be overbearing
- ❖ He must not be quick-tempered
- ❖ He must not be given to drunkenness
- ❖ He must not be violent
- ❖ He must not pursue dishonest gain
- ❖ He must be hospitable
- ❖ He must be one who loves what is good
- ❖ He must be self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined

- ❖ He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message that is taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

How's that for a list of do's and don'ts for those who were seeking the job of elder in the churches of Crete? Paul was instructing Titus in what to look for as he tried to find the best leaders for the churches Paul had started there. Though the list is long, it is not very different than the qualifications often given by a church for those who wish to be elders or deacons or leaders. If we changed the pronoun from he to 'they' so it includes women, do you think this list would match our church? You needn't answer that. It was rhetorical.

There was a solid reason that Paul was so specific in his instructions was simply that many Cretans were the exact opposite of what Titus was given on his check list. Paul says that many were liars, evil, lazy and had corrupt minds and consciences. Some claimed that they knew God, but the way they chose to live said that was not true. They could not be leaders in the church. We would not want that quality of individuals in our churches as our leaders either.

Yes, we are all sinners, and there isn't one among us who has not transgressed at some point in our lives. That's irrefutable. If church could only ordain or call perfect individuals, I'm sorry to tell you, the table would be empty. But what Paul is telling Titus is what the Bible is telling us. There are standards of Christian behavior that we should be following and trying hard to live by. Yes, this chapter of

Titus is directed at the elders. If you wait until next Sunday, you will see what Paul told Titus about the way the people in the church – believers in Christ – should behave. That is definitely an eye-opener, so I trust you will join me next week for more of Paul’s expectations about how those of us who form a congregation should live our lives. Do you want a head start? Read Chapter 2 of the book of Titus and see what it says. Until then, we’ll simply keep our eyes on the character and qualifications of elected leaders in the church.