

HOPE FOR YOUR WORK

THE GOSPEL, HOPE, AND THE WORLD

[DR. TIMOTHY KELLER | Sermon transcript, 25 October 2009]

Titus 2:11-3:9 — For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 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.

These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

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 become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

In this series we have been looking at what Redeemer is here to do in the city. Each week we are looking at how the gospel gives us hope, and how that hope shapes the way in which we live in the city.

Today we are focusing on how hope doesn't just give us inner peace or influence our family life, but how it shapes our public life out in the world, and, in particular, the way in which we do our work.

This passage in Titus is a very rich text. There is much in it, but we are only going to look at it with regard to how the gospel hope shapes our public life. I would like you to see the *passion* of hope, a *case study* of hope (we are going to apply this to “work”), and the *reason* for hope.

THE PASSION OF HOPE

Look at Titus 2:12-14. It says, “We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” What does that lead to? We are waiting for the second coming, which is called the blessed hope, and that creates a people who are “eager to do what is good,” *passionate* to do what is good; and, it says in verse 12, who are able to lead upright lives.

Let me pull all this together quickly. Do you think that if you believe in the return of Jesus Christ—a visible, personal, historical event in the future—that that makes you somebody like the people who stand on the street corner with a “The end is near!” sign? For some reason they never shave; you feel like it is because they don’t really care what happens to this world because it is going to end any moment. So, if you believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ that could come any time, does that mean that you don’t care about this world? No, not at all.

When the Bible brings up the second coming of Christ, and by the way it does a lot—in the New Testament, it is mentioned close to three hundred times; one out of every thirteen verses is about the second coming—but it is never brought up to get you to speculate about the end. Jesus says that when he was on earth, even he didn’t know when the second coming was going to happen (Matthew 24:36). The whole point of bringing up the second coming—whenever it is brought up by Paul or John or Jesus or whoever—is always to get you passionate about living *now*, passionate about living *here*.

How does that work? Cornelius Plantinga says in his book *Engaging God’s World* that the second coming is good news for people whose lives are filled with bad news. If you are a slave in Pharaoh’s Egypt or in the southern United States in the early nineteenth century, or if you are an Israelite exiled in Babylon, or a Kosovar exiled in Albania, if you are a woman in a culture where when your husband is mad at you he can lock you in a closet or call up his buddies and threaten to have them rape you, if you are a Christian in sub-Saharan Africa today where AIDS is devastating whole populations, you don’t yawn when someone mentions the return of Jesus. The coming of the kingdom depends on the coming of the King, and the coming of the King means justice will at last fill the earth.¹

What that means, Plantinga says, is, “Passionate Christians want the return of the Lord. And, let me add, so do compassionate ones.”² Let’s just think this out. If you long for Christ’s appearing, then you long for the conditions that will accompany that appearing. What are the two basic things that will happen when he comes back? He will be known—every eye will see him, all will know his truth—and it will be the end of death, disease, injustice, suffering, hunger. Therefore, if you care about the second coming, Plantinga says that it makes you passionate and compassionate to do the same two things. You want everyone to know him, and you also want to see the end of suffering and disease and injustice. And, as a result, he is saying anyone who longs for the appearing of Jesus is eager to do good—eager to call people to believe, and eager to love and sacrificially serve everybody, whether they believe or not. That is what makes you compassionate and passionate.

We are also told in verse 12 that it makes you live “upright” lives. The translation of that word “upright” obscures things a little. It is a very important word. It is the Greek word *dikaiōs*, which means “justice.” It means to live a just life.

Now what does it mean to live justly in the world? When you or I see the word “righteous” in the Bible, we almost immediately think of private morality. We think of “Don’t cheat on your spouse, and tell the truth, and go to church, and pray, and so forth.” That is not what the word means. The word “righteous” means to live *justly* in the world. Bruce Waltke, a famous Bible scholar, says this after having read the entire Bible looking at the idea of what it means to be righteous or just. In the Bible, the “just” are those who “are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage the community; the [unjust] are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves.”³

He goes on and says most people think of “being unrighteous” as lying or committing adultery, and of course that is true, but unrighteousness, or living with a lack of justice, goes beyond that. Proverbs 3:27 says, “Do not withhold good...when it is in your power to act.” A just person is someone who lives in the constant recognition of the claims of human community upon you. And therefore it is unrighteous to not feed the poor when you

1. See Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 104, 141-142.

2. *Ibid.*, 142.

3. Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 97.

have the power to do so, to take so much income out of your business that your own employees are paid poorly, or to be too busy with your own concerns to look in on your elderly neighbors.

Do you see what he is saying? When the Bible says you live an upright life, it means you live a just life, which means you constantly sense, recognize, and feel the claims of human community on you. Bruce Waltke says that a just person sees his or her resources as belonging to the human community around them; whereas, a wicked person is someone who says, “These are mine!”

The blessed hope turns you into a just person, a person who is incredibly civic-minded, a person who is incredibly public-minded, *passionate* for public justice. Passionate. That is the first thing we see, and it is very important to recognize.

By the way, if I was spending more time on this, I could show you how this believing in the blessed hope—making you a people eager to do what is good, living just lives—leads to Titus 3:1–2: “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all.” That is not just talking about private life. It is talking about your public life: being law-abiding, working for peace in society, showing a humble servant attitude toward *all* people—all beliefs, all races—working for peace with all the groups out there, and mostly, ready to do whatever is good. All the commentators say this cannot just mean ethical goodness in general. This is the *common good*. What would be the best thing for our city, something everyone would benefit from? Maybe to make the public schools better. Okay, then that is something we care about. That is what we are talking about here—the passion that Christian hope creates. The blessed hope makes you a people eager to work for the common good.

A CASE STUDY OF HOPE

I would like to take what Titus has told us about how the gospel affects your public life and apply it to one particular area, because for Redeemer this is a very important area.

We believe in helping people integrate their faith with their work. The fact is that most Christians seal off their faith from their work. They are Christians on the weekends or in their private life, but when it comes to their job, they have a tendency to just say, “I am going to avoid anything that is immoral or illegal and not think about it.” But we must!

Scripture says you are always working unto God—God is looking at your work (Ephesians 6:5–8). Christ needs to be preeminent over every part of your life (Colossians 1:18). Every single thing you do must be done for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). And Jesus says, “I don’t want my disciples to go out of the world. I want you *in* the world but not of the world. I want you to be deeply involved with it, but different” (John 17:14–19). That means we have to look at what we do.

We have to try to find out how the hope that comes from the gospel shapes how we work. That is a big part of our public life. When the text says how you live out there in the world has to be shaped by gospel hope, for many of us the biggest part of what we do in the world is our work. So we have to think it out, and it is not an easy thing to think out at all.

If you are a moralist, that is to say, if you are sure that God loves you only because you are keeping all the rules—if you don’t believe the gospel of grace very well or don’t understand it or don’t accept it or haven’t really imbibed it—then you will find that you hate this area, because you are the kind of person who wants everything down in black and white. Everything has to be very, very specific: “I want to know *exactly* what it means to be a Christian person in business, exactly what it means to be a Christian artist.” And do you know what?

You don't get "exact." You don't get little rules and regulations. You get trajectories and you get guidance, which are very important, but you don't always get exactly what to do. There are very difficult issues that Christians have to be brought together to talk about inside their vocations.

For example, if you are a Christian in the financial world, are there certain financial instruments that are used regularly in an exploitative way? Sure there are. Are you part of a financial institution in which that is happening? Maybe you don't want to think about it, but you have to think about it, because Christ has to be preeminent in every area of your life. Everything you do has to be for the glory of God.

Or, if you are in promotion or in marketing or advertising, when is the promotion that you are working on encouraging idolatry? When does the ad actually appeal to a person's insecurity and suggest to them that if you were as beautiful as this model then your troubles would be over? Where are you as a Christian participating in helping cultural idolatry move forward in the hearts of people? Maybe as a Christian you don't want to think about it. Or, you want to know exactly what ads a Christian can create and which ones they can't. Or, which stories can a Christian actor act in, and which ones she can't?

You don't get the rules. You get trajectories. And some people hate that, especially people who don't know they are saved by grace—"I only feel right with God when I am following all the rules." Well, guess what? That kind of moralism is deadly in this area, and yet you have to go here. You have to. The Bible says you have to bring the lordship of Christ into every area of your life.

What are the trajectories? Here are three. They are in the text, and they will affect how you work, though you have to work out the details of it in community. The gospel has something to do with your *motivation*, *proportion*, and *consolation*.

First of all, *motivation*. Why do you work, and why do you take the job you have? Some secular people basically say they take a job just so they can make money. You do have to eat, so sometimes that is the way it works.

Other people say, "I don't want a job just to make money; I want a job that is emotionally fulfilling" (and people who take jobs that are emotionally fulfilling look down their noses at people who take jobs just because they make money). Of course, you need to do a job that you don't utterly hate and that fits your abilities and talents somewhat, but the Bible tells us three times in this passage—in 2:14, 3:1, and 3:8—that Christians are people who are concerned about the common good.

What that means is ultimately you have to ask the question, "Is my work helping human beings flourish in some way? Is it building up human community?" I have got to ask that question, and I have to take work that may not be as financially fulfilling or even as emotionally fulfilling, if I know I can do it in a way that actually comports with human *flourishing*.

That is kind of a highfalutin word, but we need to go back to the original Old Testament spot where the first couple, Adam and Eve, are given a job, and the first job was gardening. Gardening is a paradigm for all work. Now what does a gardener do? A gardener is not a park ranger, who just walks around and doesn't touch anything. A gardener also does not pave over the garden. A gardener is someone who digs up the ground and rearranges the raw material of the soil to produce something that human beings actually need. What do they need? They need food or they need flowers for their physical or emotional needs.

All work essentially is that. It is taking raw material and rearranging it to give human beings something they need.

Music is taking the raw material of sound and rearranging it to give us sounds that are meaningful, that lift us, change us, and help us. An architect takes the raw material of the earth and creates a bridge or a building or a street, and these are things that human beings need if we are going to live in community or if we are going to survive the winter. Writers and actors act out stories. They take the raw material of human experience and

create stories that teach us or help us or give us meaning. A venture capitalist is someone who takes the raw material of an idea (or a talent) and resources and puts them together, and you have new enterprises, new products that add value to life, and new jobs.

All work is rearranging some kind of raw material to give people what human beings need. Are you doing that? Of course you probably are; I suppose there are some jobs in which you are producing something that nobody needs, but it makes money because people buy it even though it is bad for them. Christians should stay away from those jobs. (I only have so much time so I am not going to go into detail about that.) On the other hand, aren't there some jobs that are not producing things *as much* for human flourishing as others?

Here is what Christians will do. Christians will always say, "In my workplace, on my job, in my work, am I helping people flourish spiritually and physically and emotionally and relationally and socially? And I am going to do that work even if it is not as professionally fulfilling, not as emotionally fulfilling, and not as financially fulfilling, because *that* is the bottom line—what people need." That is going to influence what jobs you take. If you use that as a straightedge, it is going to influence how you do your job, and the kind of job you do, and even the department in which you work in the career that you have. That is the motivation.

Secondly, *proportion*. There is a word here that is one of my favorite words. It is the Greek word *epithumia*, which means "inordinate desires." It says, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures" (Titus 3:3). That is the word, where it says, "enslaved by all kinds of *passions*," and it is a negative word. It means an *overdesire*, an inordinate desire, a drive for something that is good but has become an addiction to you.

If you have come to New York, you have not come here to have a life—you have come to work. And therefore, there may be other places where I don't have to beat this drum, but here I do: and that is that most of us who come to New York don't just want to work. Very often we want to get a *self* out of our work. We have worked ourselves into the ground to get into that school or to get into that job and now we have "made it." The trouble with overwork—disproportionate work—is because it has become an addiction, we don't feel good about ourselves unless we are accomplishing something and can say, "I have that job."

The problem with talking about this in New York is the problem of talking to fish about water. If you say to a fish, "Tell me about water," the fish will say, "What is water?" A fish doesn't know what water is, because a fish has never been out of water. If you talk to a New Yorker about overwork, they will say the same thing: "What is overwork? How would I know what it is? It is not overwork. Everybody works like this in New York."

The average New Yorker is justified by their work—"I feel right. I feel good. I feel okay because of my work." But if it is true that you are saved by grace—"he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done....so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7)—and if the gospel really penetrates the heart, it makes you *proportionate* in your work. It enables you to rest. It enables you to not put work ahead of family and relationships, to not put it ahead of your health, not put it ahead of your sanity, not put it ahead of another job that does not give you as much status or money but is one in which you can have a balanced life. The gospel creates a "proportionateness" that really affects the way in which you work.

Finally, *consolation*. An awful lot of people ratchet back and forth in their life between *idealism*—"Through my work I am going to get *this* done; I am going to write the great American novel; I am going to accomplish this; I am going to get justice done in the world"—to *cynicism* after a few years—"Nothing ever really changes in this world; I have been beating my head against a wall."

But, what we have is a *blessed hope*—Jesus Christ is coming back, and when he comes back he is going to put everything right. That means, on the one hand, right now we do not expect everything to go well. But, on the other hand, we do know the world we want is coming.

What does that mean? J. R. R. Tolkien told a story when he was experiencing writer's block because he couldn't write his big novel, his fantasy novel *Lord of the Rings*. He was in the middle of it, and he just couldn't seem to get it finished. He wrote a short story called "Leaf by Niggle," and it is about an artist in a little town. The town has a public building, and they ask the artist, Niggle, to do a mural on the side of the public building. He takes the money, and he begins to work. He goes on for months, and then he goes on for years, and when people walk by, they see that all he has done is one little part of the side of the building in which he has drawn a leaf. It is pretty clear that he is trying to draw a tree, but he is just drawing a leaf. They start to berate him, and they say, "What is going on? We spent all this money. It has been a long time. Where is the mural?" He says, "I am working on it, I am working on it. I just can't quite get it." And then he dies, and he is on a train going to heaven, and suddenly he sees something off to the side, and he runs to it. This is what he saw:

Before him stood the Tree, his Tree, finished...its leaves opening, its branches growing and bending in the wind that Niggle had so often felt or guessed, and had so often failed to catch. He gazed at the Tree, and slowly he lifted his arms and opened them wide. "It's a gift!" he said.⁴

Here is an artist, and he can envision a tree, but he could never get out more than a leaf in his lifetime. But the tree existed—it is there.

Let's say that you go into city planning as a young person. Why? You are so excited about cities, and you have a vision about what a real city ought to be. Unless you understand this—that someday the earth will be filled with the greatest city, the New Jerusalem, and everything about it will be perfect—you are going to be discouraged, because throughout your life you are only ever going to get a leaf or a branch done.

Or, let's say you are a lawyer, and you go into law because you have this vision of justice. But in ten years you are going to be incredibly disillusioned, because you are going to find that as much as you are trying to work on things, so much of what you do is minutia; once or twice in your life you feel like you have finally got a leaf out. You need to know this. There is a tree. There will be justice. The city, the justice, the beauty, the story—whatever you are seeking to accomplish—it is there. And you won't be shocked now by just getting a leaf or two out in this life.

There is a deep consolation that Christians have through this hope, which enables them to work and work and work with all their being and never be discouraged by the frustrating atmosphere of this world, in which thorns grow up when you are trying to bring up other things. That is part of what's wrong with the world, but you have got a consolation.

There is motivation. There is proportion. There is the consolation. You put those together, and it affects the way in which you work. It affects the jobs you take. It affects how you work. It affects why you work. But it all comes from hope.

THE REASON FOR HOPE

Why do we have a right to see the second coming of Christ as a hope? Isn't it amazing that Paul can call the second coming of Christ a *blessed hope*?

Here is why it is amazing. Judgment day—the fact that Jesus is coming back to put the world right—sounds great when you think of the end of oppression, the end of genocide, the end of war, the end of disease, hunger, and death. Oh my, if there is no judgment day, what hope is there for the world? But, if there *is* a judgment day, here is the question: What hope is there for you and me?

4. J. R. R. Tolkien, "Leaf by Niggle" in *Tree and Leaf*, reprinted in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), 103-104.

Imagine that for one day everything you did and even everything you thought was put up on a monitor, and every image of your mind for a day was recorded, and you didn't know it so you just had your regular day. The next day it is put up all around the world on the Internet, on YouTube, twenty-four hours of your thought life. What would happen? You would die of shame.

Then what would it be like to actually appear before God, with all the excuses, all the self-denials, all the things that you have ever said to try to justify your self-absorption, your self-centeredness, your cruelty—all the things that are in your life that you have used to excuse and justify the way in which you live—but suddenly, they all fall off because you know God is seeing you all the way to the bottom? What hope is there? How could you call a day like this a *hope*—a *blessed hope*?

Here is the answer. The only reason we have a right to hope—to see the second coming of Jesus as a blessed hope—is this. The Heidelberg Catechism asks this question: “What comfort is it to you that Christ shall come again to judge the living and the dead?” Answer: “That in all afflictions and persecution with uplifted head I may wait for the Judge from heaven, who has *already* offered himself to the judgment of God for me, and has taken away for me all curse.”

The only reason that Paul, and you and I, can see the second coming of Jesus Christ as hope for the world *and* hope for us—the only reason we can see it as blessed—is because we have a Judge who came to be judged. He has already been here. He died on the cross. He took our punishment in our place.

We have the Judge who was *judged*. And therefore your judgment day is actually already in the past. Do you know that? God “made him to be sin who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). He judged sin in Jesus. We died in him, so that all we have for the future is a blessed hope.

Live in that hope! Let it shape the way in which you live in the world. Let's pray.

Our Father, I thank you for giving us a hope that makes us not ashamed. I thank you that this affects the way in which we live, giving us a consolation, giving us a sense of proportion, giving us a new motivation, changing the way in which we think out how our faith shapes our work. We thank you that you have made us a community of people in which we gather together to talk about this very important area of life, and we thank you for the way in which that is going to help us to live uprightly and justly in this world. Now we pray, Father, that you would grant all these things, for we ask for them through Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.

Copyright © 2010 by Timothy Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church. This transcript is based on the audio recording and has been lightly edited. The original was part of the Renew Campaign in Fall 2009, and can be found at <http://renew.redeemer.com>.

We encourage you to use this material for study and ministry purposes. If you would like to use quotes or key concepts in a sermon or other ministry resource, please provide credit to the original.