**HIS STORY 12 - TITUS & PHILEMON**

**Doing Church is sometimes hard going!** We have probably all heard the saying *“Our Church would be great if it wasn’t for the people”!* You may also know the one about the couple in bed – and she turns over and says – “Get out of bed we are going to Church” – he replies “no, I don’t want to go, nobody likes me or talks to me, I’m not going today”. She replies; “get out of bed I’m not going to tell you again”. “No, I’m not going,” he says. She says –“you’ve got to go **you’re the pastor**!”As I read the books of Titus and Philemon this week it struck me again that most of these books are about people, relationships, and relating. The books have all kinds of practical teaching about fathers, employers, workers, leadership and being men and women of integrity. It’s like Paul has the same message he writes to the Thessalonians, Timothy and now Titus. Why is that I wonder? Why say the same things so many times? It’s a bit like a worn-out record! Because this is the toughest thing to do…..where faith is worked out.So the essence of the message in Titus and Philemon is how we **relate to each other in the Church. *Because it is that which makes God’s story in our lives attractive.***

I guess that’s why many people find doing Church hard. They would prefer to have a private **faith,** that doesn’t require them to have to **interact** with others who might think, act or believe differently. Have you wondered what would happen if God decided to adopt the attitude, you know those people in Church, they are not my kind of people? I think I will overlook them especially the difficult ones. I want a church full of well adjusted, good looking, financially stable, can-do people! Yes, it just could be that the Achilles heel of God’s plan for his Church is that He will have anyone that wants to join! – We don’t exclude people. That’s why many people say things like…. Church, well ***I used to do it*** – but it’s just too hard….it’s the other people that make it so! You have heard the saying *– If you find the perfect church don’t join it – you will spoil it!*

***So what is the essential core message of Titus and Philemon?***

Titus takes us deeper into what it means to be a community. It's not so much what’s written in Titus, it’s what was happening to the writer when he wrote it – more about that in a minute. Paul reminds Titus that Jesus came not to make our lives more comfortable, or to protect us from our fears, or fix our problems. He came to bring us to the Father and to show us how to relate to each other and the World in which we live.

**The book of Titus is a kind of sandwich….**

**Jesus’ first appearance** - His purpose of coming is stated in 2:11-14. He came to reveal truth and grace. The bunch of misfits he gathered around him included zealots who wanted to go around killing Romans, fearful doubters who struggled with faith, and a betrayer who would sell out Jesus for a few dollars. This was the first community that needed truth and grace to shape them. And they walked, talked and experienced this….before it all came tumbling down on Easter week when their hopes were dashed. Truth and Grace was Jesus’ first appearance. V12 We are instructed to turn from sin and live in this World with wisdom, right living and to look forward to his return. There is a message just in that verse alone.

**Jesus’ second appearance** Titus tells us will be quite different.

He is coming back again in power and glory….The amazing re-entry of Jesus into the
World, unlike his first appearance. He is coming back as a ruling king and conqueror.

**We live between these two arrivals of Jesus** –the sandwich filling! This is the era of the gospel and grace, but the era of power and glory is coming. And the arrival of the kingdom in this World comes during this interval as we the church live out the gospel in the World and proclaim Jesus….and it will climax with the return of Jesus.

**Now a little about Titus and history**. Titus was left in Crete Island to lead a group of believers. Paul had travelled there and established a Church on the island. The year was about AD62. The Roman’s were flexing their muscles and the gospel had penetrated all levels of society in the 20 years or so since the Church had been born at Pentecost. Now opposition and persecution were coming on the Church. It was not fashionable to be a Christian, it was going to cost you, you had to stand up for Jesus. Titus was written after 1 Timothy and before 2 Timothy….and Paul recounts that when on his trial for his life.

**2 Timothy 4:16 - no one turned up to advocate for him**. And here is what struck me about Titus. It was written right at a time when Paul felt his community let him down. It was written when the writer was facing death for his faith. It was written when the writer could have felt overwhelming disappointment. Rome’s judicial system requires a hearing for the judge to hear charges against the prisoner. At this first hearing friends of the prisoner were able to come and speak as an advocate on behalf of the prisoner…..no one came for Paul. His community failed him. Between the first hearing and the second when Paul would be sentenced to death, he wrote these books. He speaks about his chains, there is the reality that apart from prayer and writing letters his day is done. Now can you see why the books of 2 Timothy and Titus are so powerful because they come out of someone who has risen above disappointment and hurt and who kept the faith by focusing on the two arrivals of Jesus and their purpose.

The first arrival – show truth and grace even through pain and suffering, the second arrival which was yet to come would show power and glory. Paul teaches Titus from his prison cell…. And he says in effect – you know the reputation those living in Crete…. They are lying, evil, lazy gluttons (Titus 1:12) You are to pastor a Church among these people.

These Cretan believers don’t just need to get along with each other, they need to forgive deeply from the heart and relate….because when they do this they show the most attractive display of grace. They need to get work, tell the truth and start showing signs of rebirth and new life. We aim too low when we think about salvation….we think it's all about us being put right with God for a heavenly destination, but Titus reminds us that – it’s way more than that. God wants the gospel to change us now by the way we relate and do Church. We on the other hand want to be only with people who treat us well. We avoid people with whom we might struggle to love and relate to. Here is the message of Titus. And it’s why so much of it is about relationships. It takes grace to do Church among people. Have you found that to be true too?

**PHILEMON Is an example of what Titus teaches.**

If Titus is a book that shows us how to handle life’s hurts and disappointments by showing grace. Then Philemon is a book that tells a story of how someone who was wronged is asked to forgive. Philemon was a good man, a faithful leader – his slave’s name was Onesimus who had stolen from him and then run away. Somehow this slave ended up in prison with Paul….believed the gospel message of Jesus and now Paul sends him home to Philemon and the Church that meets in his house.

So, who has wronged you and you need to forgive and release from your judgment? So what is the right thing to do? Write off the people who wrong you and distance yourself from them. When you see them or hear about what they are doing….you act with indifference and remember what they did to you. You feel justified for your way of thinking because of the pain they caused…. how wrong they are and when they come to realise it, maybe something might happen. How many thousands of times has this happened in Church and your relationships?

Philemon teaches us that the onus is on us to forgive, from the heart. How does God relate to people who wrong him? Have not we also stolen from God and run away from his home? And yet the arrival of Jesus declares – let me pay his debt! Jesus says to us – I will take the injustice on me – you can go free. It’s the same we are to offer each other and Paul does for Onesimus if there is any cost or anything to pay, charge it to me!

Philemon – I’m not just asking you to forgive this man who wronged you. I’m asking you to receive him back. Not as a slave whom you can order around but as a brother in Christ. I want you to embrace him. Now think about the people in your life who have wronged you. It is only when you forgive them from your heart that you free them to return. The picture of Philemon is of a father with open outstretched arms – in a welcome embrace.

**Titus** – contains the story of **Paul choosing to show grace when disappointed** and hurt. **Philemon** – tells the story of **forgiveness and embrace of someone who has wronged you.**

Right now….lets just be still and examine our hearts.

I want you to think of four people who have hurt, disappointed, or wronged you. It won’t be difficult because this happens all too often in life. And today God is asking you to set them free by forgiving them. Until you want to experience God more than hold a grudge you will never do it. Yes, being in the Church is not easy at times. It is our inability to forgive and love one another from the heart that ruins relationships and destroys Churches. Here is what we often do, we just avoid the person who has hurt or wronged us. The Bible speaks of intentionally dealing with and restoring the relationship. That’s my message today, I’m praying that God will give us the grace to respond.