

Your Past, Your Future, and the Cross
Some Thoughts from Titus 2 & 3
Faith Community Church – December 30, 2007

Introduction

God has established times and seasons and measures the passing of time by days, weeks, months and years. Marking time as we do provides opportunity for closure on the past and renewal for the future.

Clearly the Bible teaches us to be aware of time and its meaning. For example, the prayer of Moses recorded in Psalm 90:12 contains these words:

“So teach us to number our days so that we may get a heart of wisdom.”

Similarly, Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:15-18

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

Therefore to live day-to-day without any sense of reflection is to live a life that is both impoverished and disobedient.

I want to ask you to use your imagination this morning and draw a long line in your mind. On the left, visualize 2007 ending, and on the right, 2008 beginning. In the middle, at the end of the old and the beginning of the new, a cross. I'd like to talk about what this image represents – the past – your past, the future – your future, and the cross.

Your Past, Your Future and the Cross

1. The first thing I want us to think about is this: Looking at your past in the light of the cross gives you an opportunity to face your failures and find forgiveness.
 - a. In his book, *The Cross Centered Life*, C.J. Mahaney tells of seeing a comic strip in which the character is sitting home reviewing her life, thinking of ways things she could have done better. After reviewing responsibilities, relationships, disciplines and her failures in them, she finally says, “Even when I’m not going anywhere, I have three hundred pounds of luggage with me.”
 - b. A lot of people carry a lot of extra baggage in the form of past regrets and failures. And there are really only two ways to deal with them:
 - i. One way is to ignore or minimize our failings and failures, which is ultimately crippling because it hardens us.

- ii. The other way is to find forgiveness through the cross.
 - c. It is imperative to our spiritual health that we look at our past from the perspective of the cross. What does that mean?
 - i. First, we need to be clear about the impact of the Gospel. Read Titus 3:1-7. Two things here:
 - 1. The “we were once, but now are” idea is key to understanding what happens when a person comes to faith in Christ. We are not what we used to be.
 - a. Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 2:13-14.
 - b. Some people say, “Well, those passages are about my sins before I became a Christian.” But that misses the point of what the Gospel is all about. Paul clearly tells us that the cross deals with all of our sin for all time. See Romans 8:33-34.
 - 2. What makes this possible? How can this be? Look at Titus 3:4,5. We have been recipients of the mercy of God.
 - ii. Therefore, we need to be confident of God’s forgiveness through the cross. Many of you have memorized 1 John 1:9 – *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* David spoke of this same thing in Psalm 32:1-5.
 - d. When we turn from our sin and admit it for what it is, the matter is settled. There is no need to carry around the baggage of failure when we look at our past in the light of the cross. So maybe you blew it big time this year, or maybe your life was a pattern of seemingly smaller failures. The cross gives us a new start, and I urge you to build your life on that truth.
2. The second thing that I want us to think about is this: Looking at your future in the light of the cross gives us an opportunity to pursue a life of purposefully pleasing God.
 - a. We need go understand that the Gospel is not just about what we are saved from, but what we are saved to. Note how Paul surrounds the passage we’ve just looked at in Titus 3 with this idea:
 - i. Titus 2:11-14 (note verse 15).
 - ii. Titus 3:8

- b. Living life in light of the cross help's us see life's purpose clearly. And that purpose is to please God.

Connecting This To Our Lives

The cross of Christ is about God's grace in providing an escape from sin's penalty and power. It is so very important that we learn to live a life that is focused on the cross and what Jesus accomplished. It keeps us from legalism, of trying to please God by collecting brownie points from good behavior. It is the answer to our guilt and failure, and it is the power to do what God has called us to do. We can build our lives on the certainty of God's forgiveness and the expectation of his grace.

I don't know what 2007 was like for you. It is all too easy to go around looking like we have it all together and to be fighting a war inside. And I don't know what 2008 will bring. But no matter what, let me encourage you to look at your past and look at your future in light of the cross.