

## According To Mercy • Titus 3:3-8

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. *Stockholm Syndrome*

1. Some years ago, a bank employee was taken hostage during a robbery in Stockholm, Sweden
2. Negotiations with the robbers for her release weeks, and while both sides tried to get the advantage on the other, something interesting happened to the hostage
  - a. she developed a sense of *sympathy* for her captors; her fear turned to empathy
  - b. and when those who were supposed to be her protectors appeared to be more concerned about their pocketbooks than her well-being,
  - c. she ended up switching sides and became a supporter of the robbers.
3. From this well known case in Sweden, sociologists have coined the phrase *Stockholm Syndrome* to describe some, who when taken hostage for a long period of time, end up becoming a supporters of their kidnappers.
4. It turns out that it is a fairly common response of people who live under the stress of being a hostage for a long time.
5. Probably the most well-known example of Stockholm Syndrome in our time is Patty Hearst – daughter of the Hearst family and fortune.
  - a. she was kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army in 1974
  - b. and ended up becoming one of their followers
  - c. her picture, taken during a bank robbery, holding an assault rifle, has become something of an icon of our times.

#### B. *Our Stockholm Syndrome*

1. But there's *another* case of Stockholm Syndrome that ought to be even *more memorable* to us than the story of Patty Hearst.
2. It's the story of *our own* hostage taking
  - a. it's the story of how you and I were taken captive by this fallen world
  - b. and how we *embraced* our bondage and joined it's cause

3. But God launched a heavenly hostage rescue operation
  - a. His agent was His Son, Jesus Christ -
  - b. who slipped quietly into this world and set us free through the cross
4. The Apostle Paul describes this hostage rescue operation in Titus 3:3-8

## II. TEXT

### A. V. 3

1. In v. 3, Paul describes us when we were hostages to sin
- <sup>3</sup>For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.**
2. This is a pretty bleak picture – but we have to admit, it’s an accurate one of humanity apart from God.
  3. In the Garden of Eden, Satan laid a trap for Adam and Eve
    - a. they fell for it and were taken captive to sin and death
    - b. because of that Fall, all of their descendants are born into a state of sin and are spiritual hostages
    - c. because our captivity begins at conception, we grow up knowing nothing *but* that captivity and think it normal
    - d. we don’t need to be “tied to the chair” because we have no desire to “escape the room!”
  4. In this verse, Paul describes who and what we were before Christ saved us.
    - a. we were fools because we lived as though God did not exist
    - b. we disobeyed the law of God written on our hearts
    - c. we were deceived and could not even see reality for what it is
    - d. we gave ourselves completely to the pursuit of our own pleasure
    - e. and when anyone got in the way of that pursuit, we got angry
    - f. if someone had more than us, we grew jealous
    - g. we treasured up the hurts life brought us and became bitter and hateful.
  5. All of these traits are marks of a *spiritual Stockholm Syndrome*
  6. They are what we did in *embracing* the fallenness of the human race.

7. But in vs. 4-7, Paul turns to show what *God* did in rescuing us . . .

### **B. Vs. 4-5a**

**4**But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,

**5**not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us,

1. Stop right there!
2. Vs. 4-7 are another of the run-on sentences Paul is so famous for
3. But the crux of what Paul has to say is right here –
  - a. look at v. 4 again

**“When the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared**

- b. then jump to the middle of v. 5

### **He saved us!**

- c. that’s the main idea, the core truth Paul is sharing here.
- d. because of kindness & love = God saved us!
4. Verse 3 is what *man* has done – Verse 4 is what *God* has done!
5. After reading v. 3, what we would *expect* to read in v. 4 is, “So, God wiped them all out.”
6. V. 4 *doesn’t* begin with “So,” – It begins with “But”
  - a. we may *deserve* judgment and wrath
  - b. but God, because He is kind and loving, has shown us *mercy* instead of judgment!
    - 1) mercy means not getting what’s deserved
    - 2) God’s mercy is more than a feeling, it’s an action
  - c. His mercy was made *visible* by the coming of Jesus Christ who took our place and offered the ransom price to set us free from our captivity.
6. Hostage rescue is a dangerous business, and sometimes the rescuers pay the ultimate price
7. Such was the case in the daring rescue of the Jewish hostages at the airport in Entebbe.
  - a. a jet full of Jewish travelers was hijacked by terrorists and diverted to Uganda

- b. the passengers were taken off the plane and herded in to an terminal at the airport
  - c. while Israeli negotiators stalled, a commando team was quickly assembled
  - d. under cover of darkness, in a lightening fast strike, they infiltrated the terminal and took out the terrorists
  - e. the only casualty suffered by the rescue team was their commanding officer
  - f. he gave his life that the hostages could be free
8. Jesus came to set at liberty those who were bound – but at the cost of His own life
  9. His blood was the ransom paid for our freedom

### **C. Vs. 4-7**

1. Why did God save us?
2. Was it because we were so good and lovable that He was compelled by His sense of justice to save us?
3. Absolutely not!
4. V. 3 makes it very clear who and what we were before He saved us
5. No – God saved us, BECAUSE **HE** IS KIND AND LOVING, not because we are worthy or deserving.
6. Look at it again . . .

**4But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,**

**5not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,**

**6whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,**

**7that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**

7. It's NOT by works of righteousness we've done, but according to His mercy that He saved us.
8. Note that friend – this is crucial!
  - a. it is not *by* mercy God saves us, but *according* to His mercy

- we're saved.
- b. here's the difference
- 1) if we were saved BY mercy, then it would mean that God's mercy is the *agent* of our salvation
  - 2) But mercy isn't what saves us – Jesus saves us!
  - 3) it's His work on the cross that's the effectual means of our salvation
  - 4) God's mercy is what *moves* Him to apply Christ's work to us.
  - 5) when Paul says that God saves us *ACCORDING* to His mercy, he's speaking about how *far* that salvation goes
- c. let me use an illustration
- 1) you're at the beach and are out in the water, having some fun splashing around in the waves
  - 2) suddenly, you get caught in a riptide and are swept out to sea
  - 3) your strength begins to go and you realize if you don't get help soon you may drown, so you call out for help
  - 4) Bill Mount happens to be at the beach that day with his family
  - 5) now, Bill is a lifeguard and an expert swimmer skilled in rescuing people from the water
  - 6) he has the *ability* to save you but does he have the *motivation*?
  - 7) he's not on duty today – he's having a nice time with his family on the beach
  - 8) but when he hears your cries for help, being the kind and merciful person he is, he tosses his wallet to his wife and runs as fast as he can to the water
  - 9) with those powerful strokes of his he races out to where you are and wraps his arm across your chest, then he starts for shore
  - 10) tell me, has Bill saved you?
  - 11) well, yes, part way – he's kept your head from falling beneath the waves
  - 12) and with each yard he swims, you're getting safer and safer
  - 13) but you won't be fully saved till he brings you to shore
  - 14) is it likely Bill's *motivation* to save you is going to change halfway to shore?
  - 15) no-his kindness and mercy will see you safely on dry land,

free of the threat of drowning.

- d. in the same way – God’s ABILITY to save us comes through the finished work of Jesus Christ
- e. but He’s MOVED to save us because He is merciful and kind!
  - 1) that mercy, because it is God’s mercy, is *perfect* and *inexhaustible*
    - a) in Psalm 136, 26 times the Psalmist tells us “His mercy endures forever.”
    - 2) and He saves us ACCORDING to that mercy
    - 3) which means that His salvation will see us safely to the heavenly shore, free from the threat and danger of sin
    - 4) in Phil 1:6, Paul says, “I’m confident of this very thing; that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it.”
- f. In Lamentations 3 we find this comforting word . . .

**22 Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not.**

**23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.**

- 1) every morning when you rise, a fresh supply of mercy is available to you
- 2) yesterday’s failures do not “use up” God’s supply of mercy and grace
- 3) they are new every morning.

#### **D. V. 8**

- 1. There’s so much more in these verses for us to look at but we’ll leave it for our study this Wednesday evening
- 2. For now, look at v. 8 . . .

**8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.**

- 3. Paul’s made it crystal clear in v. 5 that we are not saved by good works
- 4. But this verse gives us the right perspective on the role of good works in the Christian life
- 5. While we aren’t saved *by* works – we are saved *to* them!

### III. CONCLUSION

#### ***A. Putting It All Together***

1. Let me end this morning by putting vs. 3-8 all together
2. V. 3 shows us life apart from God
3. V. 8 shows us what Life in God produces
4. Vs. 4-7 show us how we get this life – it's the gift of God, bestowed on us according to His mercy

#### ***B. Pride Vs. Mercy***

1. Please read v. 3 with me again

**For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.**

2. Folks – let's be honest – this was us BC; before Christ!
3. Now let's read vs. 4 & 5 again

**<sup>4</sup>But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,**

**<sup>5</sup>not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,**

4. Into the midst of our sin-sick lives, God came and saved us
5. Have you ever noticed how proud and arrogant Christians can sometimes be?
  - a. it's sad to say that all too often we come across as self-righteous and superior
  - b. we look down our noses at the lost
  - c. we forget that the salvation we now enjoy is NOT the result of our own work and goodness but God's work and goodness
  - d. we forget that we are saved by grace, according to the mercy of God.
  - e. instead of the most profound humility toward God and tenderness toward others, we come off as strident and haughty
6. Listen – if we've been truly saved, if we've been rescued from captivity to the sin mentioned in v. 3 to the life described in vs. 4-7, then the mercy that marks God will come to mark us.

7. If we're saved according to His mercy, then we'll become a *people* **OF** mercy; not pride, nor arrogance, nor superiority.
8. Besides the mercy and humility we ought to show to the lost, what about one another within the Body of Christ.
  - a. if we are those redeemed by grace – then where is the grace toward one another?
  - b. if we are saved according to God's mercy – then where is the mercy toward one another when we fail one another?
    - 1) sir, how merciful are you toward your wife?
    - 2) ma'am, how merciful are you toward your husband?
    - 3) brothers and sisters in Christ, let's be careful that we don't put a heavy yoke on those who are new to the faith and demand that they suddenly adopt a lifestyle of total holiness and complete compliance to what we think is fitting and proper.
    - 4) of course God calls us to holiness, but the means He has given us of getting there is loving support and fellowship.
    - 5) all too often the church becomes a seething cauldron of gossip and criticism as people pass judgment on one another
    - 6) just as the kindness and love of God appeared in the person of Jesus Christ, God wants Jesus Christ to become visible in the quality of life of His people, specially as we gather with one another in fellowship

### **C. By Mercy**

1. As we live according to the mercy of God, we do what v. 8 says
2. The salvation of God becomes *visible* through our lives.
3. This [the Bible] reveals the Word of God in black and white.
4. But when we live what this says, then the Word of God is revealed in all the colors of the rainbow.