

# KNOW WHO YOU ARE

## Difference Makers (Part 1) | Titus 1:1-3

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Last Sunday, we were pleased to welcome Navy Chaplain, Billy Hardison, to the pulpit of Christ Church. If you didn't get to hear him, it is worth going to our website and listening to it. Drawing on his experience with the U.S. Special Forces Command, Billy unpacked for us the provocative message of Ephesians 6. There Paul says that you and I are caught up in a great spiritual battle. Every day we walk onto a field of engagement where God's Enemy is at work through a variety of forces not just to influence us slightly but to take us captive completely. Satan wants to make us forget our training, to deny our ultimate allegiance, and to neutralize us as the agents of God's kingdom we could otherwise be.

As Chaplain Hardison said: God's Word and his Church can help us learn how to survive, evade, resist and escape the Enemy's grip. I want to think more about this with you today and over the next few weeks but take it a step further than that. I am inviting you to reflect with me (and some of my colleagues) about how we not only avoid being taken captive by the Enemy but actually take ground against him.

The gospels make it clear that Jesus saw his followers not as some defensive group, hiding in a trench or huddling in a bunker, hoping to hold out a little longer against the superior strength of Satan or secularism. Jesus saw the Church as an offensive movement, a wave of change agents, a legion of spiritual special forces. In the language of this series, Jesus called his followers to be DIFFERENCE MAKERS. "Be like salt... or light... or yeast..." he said (Matt 5:13-16; 13:33). Be a positive presence that leaves people and places transformed for the good.

What I want to stress today is that this kind of influence doesn't just *happen* by accident. In this series, we are going to see that the people Jesus uses to make a profound difference in their families and workplace and other spheres often share THREE PARTICULAR QUALITIES. First, they are very clear about their identity. Secondly, they bring to others some particularly great gifts that help vitalize other's lives. And, thirdly, they leave a legacy through individuals and institutions that outlasts them. This portrait of a *Christian influencer* can be discerned from many teachings in the New Testament but it is especially vivid in the first chapter of what we call THE LETTER TO TITUS and I am really excited to be studying this text with you.

When was the last time you wrote somebody a significant letter? Where were you when you wrote it and what were you trying to get across? Scholars tell us that St. Paul wrote this letter in the year 63 A.D. Some years before, Paul had accompanied his young protégé, Titus, to the island of Crete and, having acquainted him with the place, left him there to pastor a struggling Christian community. In the intervening years, Paul had been arrested and imprisoned by the Romans. Upon his eventual release, he

made his home briefly in a city called Nicopolis on the western coast of Greece. It was there that he sat down and penned this short letter, just three chapters long. **4]** Like most letters in ancient times, this one begins with the author introducing himself. It continues with a salutation or greeting to the addressee. It then moves into the main body of the communication. And it concludes with some final remarks.

Today, we'll examine just the Author's Introduction, only three verses long, and what those verses tell us. Listen to how Paul introduces himself: **Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness— in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior (Titus 1:1-3).**

If you remember nothing else you hear today, please remember this part. More often than not, the people who God uses to make the biggest difference for good in the lives of others exhibit extreme clarity about WHO they are. They never walk into a new environment thinking, *"Gosh, I wonder who I AM today. I wonder who I should BE in this situation. I wonder which of my many alternate personae is going to be most useful here?"* On the contrary, Christian Difference-Makers live with a very clear sense of their unchanging identity. That dependable core flows through all they do and wherever they go.

You've probably met some folks for whom that isn't true. You likely know people who mouth certain virtues or values but actually ARE someone who's core orientation contradicts what they are saying. When I was a kid and my parents dragged me to church, I would meet these guys at the coffee hour on Sunday morning who talked and acted as if they were very dedicated Christ-followers. And then, on Sunday afternoon, I would caddy for them at the local golf course. The way they talked and acted there was not very Jesus-like. It was one of the major reasons why I eventually rejected religion. As Ralph Waldo Emerson famously quipped: *"Who they are speaks so loudly that we cannot hear what they are saying."*

The opposite is true for the people Christ uses to be salt and light and yeast – God's special forces -- in this world. Who they ARE – their core IDENTITY... their basic inner orientation toward God, self, and others – makes people more inclined to listen to whatever they are saying. So, here's a very personal question: ***What's your core identity?*** How do you think of yourself? What do you conceive as your essential place and purpose in life? And what difference might it make if you and I chose or settled more deeply into an identity like the Apostle Paul's?

There are FOUR WAYS Paul conceives of his essential place and purpose that I think are worth noting and imitating ourselves. But before jumping in there, let me just observe that when it came to introducing himself in this letter, Paul had some pretty good

options. For example, he could have begun by saying: "I am ***Paul, a graduate of Gamaliel's law school,***" and that would have impressed all the professional people who knew that Gamaliel's was the most prestigious law school in the Middle East." He could have said: "I am ***Paul, a former leader of the Jewish Pharisees***" and that would have wowed all the religiously-oriented people who got how rigorous the Pharisee standards were. He could have begun, ***I am Paul, a Roman Citizen,*** and that would have created approving murmurs among all the politically-savvy people who understood that being granted a Roman citizenship was a passport to privilege that only 1-3% of people held.

All those things were true of Paul. He had all those credentials. They just were not his core IDENTITY – the things from which he got his life-orienting sense of place and purpose. No, the first thing he says is: I am **Paul, a servant of God**. The Greek word for servant there is "*doulos*" – which means someone purchased for a price. A *doulos* was someone whose status came from two factors: 1. the greatness of the price paid for him or her; and 2. the greatness of the household he or she now served. A *doulos* could be a "slave" as we usually conceive of the term -- someone miserably grinding beneath the heel of a cruel, greedy master in a lousy household. Or a *doulos* could be someone held not by chains but bound to their vocation by awe and admiration for the One who brought them into their family and by their aspiration for the importance of the work they got to do for that household.

It is in this second sense, that we read: I am **Paul, a servant of God**. Paul is not embarrassed by that word, "servant." He is exhilarated by it. It is in light of the Cross of Christ and the worthiness of getting to serve God's great household that Paul says elsewhere to the Church: Remember, **you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies. You were bought at a price, so do not become slaves of human beings" (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23)**. Do you grasp the size of the price paid for you by Jesus at the cross or the significance of the work he's given you as a member of his household? Would you be embarrassed or exhilarated to introduce yourself to others as, first and foremost, ***a servant of God?***

Then, in the opening verse of the Letter to Titus, the author tells us more about his identity: I am Paul, a servant of God **and an apostle of Jesus Christ**. The Greek word "apostolos" literally means "sent one." John 20:21 records Jesus as saying not just to the original Twelve but to all his disciples: **As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you**. An apostle is someone who has been sent on a mission by a great authority. Other people may struggle to figure out their life's mission. Others may wander through life trying to prove their worth or authority on the basis of their own credentials. As an apostle *of Jesus Christ*, you will not have those problems.

If your identity is rooted in the reality that you've been SENT by Jesus Christ, then whatever your day-to-day job or occupation is, you'll always know that your enduring mission is to bear witness to Jesus (which simply means to share what you know of

him). Your mission is to do whatever you can to help more people follow him, to become immersed in the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and to learn the beautiful ways of his kingdom. It is vital to remember that when you commit yourself to that mission, you're not doing something TO people but FOR people. Jesus and the way of his kingdom are not one among many optional "religions." They are the indispensable antidote to everything that ails humanity. Christ is everyone's hope.

Having declared his identity as a servant of God and sent by Jesus Christ, Paul goes on to say, in effect, that I also think of myself as a sower. That specific word "sower" isn't in the text here, though you will perhaps remember it from our study of Galatians and the multiple ways Jesus speaks of the importance of sowing in the Gospels. In re-introducing himself to Titus, Paul simply reminds his protégé that he sees himself as someone out **to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.**

Throughout the New Testament, truth is often likened to a generative seed. Truth is something that, when planted and allowed to take root, bears the fruit of greater godliness – which is to say a more flourishing kind of life. I think about how this has worked in my own experience. Paul says in Romans 12 that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds – by the replacement of bad ideas with better ones – and I've found that to be so. Over the years, God has used numerous people to plant truths in me that have made a dramatic difference in my life.

For example, the truth that you can't give sin – whether it be greed, lust, pride, envy or wrath -- a foothold without seeing it climb (Matthew 5)... The truth that servant love is the greatest form of power (Matt 20:26)... The truth that by confessing failure and need you grow stronger not weaker (2 Cor 12:9; James 4:10)... The truth that deep relationships are the most significant kind of wealth (1 Cor 12:31-13:13)... The truth that you can't outgive God (Malachi 3:10-11)... The truth that developing great character requires more adversity than you'll want (James 1:2-4)... These ideas are being taught less and less in the world today. The Bible and the Church are where we learn them. Yet, when it comes to human flourishing, these seeds of truth are the DIFFERENCE-MAKERS. So, I have a question for you: ***What is one transforming truth God has seeded in you that you might now sow into the lives of others?***

As we move toward a close, I want to remind you of the focus for today's reflections. **11]**I said at the start that the Christians who make the biggest difference in people's lives exhibit extreme clarity about who they are. Their sense of identity flows through all they do and wherever they go. In other words, if you want to be a DIFFERENCE-MAKER, then KNOW WHO YOU ARE.

I am lifting up Paul in this series as someone who had that kind of clarity. Paul saw himself as a servant of God, as someone sent on a mission by Jesus Christ, and as a sower of the seeds of truth that lead to godliness. I am inviting YOU to see yourself

this way, too – to let these orientations be the core of an unimpeachable identity you take with you wherever you go. But there is one more disposition in Paul that I also hope you'll let seep in. Paul also saw himself as a ***steward*** of the message of hope -- **the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior.**

If you've read much of the Bible, you'll have already noted that you and I are called to be stewards of a lot of things – of our relationships, of the Earth, of our time, our talent, and our treasure. But Paul reminds us, in his Self-Introduction to Titus, that ***Christians have also been entrusted as stewards of a message about the hope of eternal life.*** Each of us is called to help pass on to others the news that God has provided a way for human beings to experience life in all its fullness and for all of time. The message can be as simply put as it is in John 3:16, the first verse I ever memorized: **For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son that whosoever believes in him may have everlasting life (John 3:16).**

You may have your own version of that same truth. Charlie Browning reminded several of us recently that at the funeral of Eugene Peterson, the celebrated pastor and author whose paraphrase of the Bible we call THE MESSAGE version, his son Leif made a bold confession: *"You know, my Dad had only ONE sermon."* He preached a lot of them. His specific words certainly varied across times and places and audiences, but at the core there was really only one message and it was this: *God loves you. He is on your side. He is coming after you. He is relentless. **What's YOUR one sermon?***

However you put it, you and I are servants of that God. We have been sent out to bring others into the blessed circle formed by his love and wisdom. Put us in any family, job, or social environment and we'll find ways to sow the seeds of truth that transform people for good. And all the while, we'll keep stewarding a message that points people back to the One who is our hope in this world and for life everlasting.

This, my friends, is our IDENTITY as Christians. It's what makes us a special spiritual force in our world. When the powers at work in our culture try to dissuade or distract us from this, let's help each other stay clear on this calling. For this clarity is a big part of what it takes to be DIFFERENCE-MAKERS.