

TITUS 2.11: THE SAVIOUR HAS COME!

(Central Baptist Church, Christmas Eve 2006)

What a difference light makes to life.

Just imagine if all of a sudden we were plunged into total darkness – in spite of the candles, the service couldn't go on.

What's more, supposing the power cut was not confined to the church, but extended to the street lighting outside. It would be a scary business finding our way home – especially if the clouds have hidden the moon and stars from our view.

We need light to find our way about – nothing could be worse than to be plunged into absolute darkness.

With that thought in mind, listen to the words of Paul: **“The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all”** (NRSV). For the next few minutes I want to take that text apart and reflect on each word or phrase:

1. THE LIGHT SHINES

“The grace of God has APPEARED”

The verb present here (*epiphaneo*) is found in Luke 1.79 where Zechariah proclaims: **“Our God is merciful and tender. He will cause the bright dawn of salvation to rise on us and to shine from heaven on all those who live in the dark shadow of death, to guide our steps into the path of peace”**.

Zechariah's picture here is of a world in darkness, in which people have lost their sense of direction. It is a world without purpose, without joy, and without peace. Into this darkness he sees the light of the Saviour appearing.

Zechariah's world is also our world.

People may celebrate the season of Christmas with music and dancing in the pubs and clubs of our town, but their celebrations are hollow and meaningless, and are reminiscent of the dance band playing, as the Titanic sank.

For without Christ we are lost and doomed to a Godless eternity.

It is a dark world.

Against such a backdrop Paul declares: **“the grace of God has appeared”**.

Tonight we celebrate that at a particular moment in history, God in his grace entered our world in the person of his Son to dispel the darkness.

We are not in the dark – we may live our lives in the light of Christ. Hallelujah!

2. JESUS SAVES

But there may be another picture present, when Paul speaks of the appearing of the grace of God.

For the underlying Greek word, from which we get our word 'epiphany', was used not just of the appearing of light, but of the appearing of a Saviour.

E.g. there were dozens of temples devoted to the worship of Asclepius, the god of

healing: Asclepius was said to have brought about many cures through his 'appearances'.

In the developing cult of Emperor worship, the birth or enthronement or victory of an emperor was called an 'epiphany'.

In such a context, Paul declares that **“the grace of God has appeared bringing SALVATION to all”**.

Tonight we come to celebrate that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God in his grace intervened to save us from our sin.

Jesus saves – he can save even you & me.

3. NO EXPENSE SPARED

“The GRACE of God has appeared bringing salvation to all”

When I was in Sunday School I was taught that Grace is 'God's Riches At Christ's Expense'.

Grace is God's Christmas gift to the world

It is a gift where no expense was spared. For God has given us his all.

The story is told of a minister talking to a couple who were having difficulties in their marriage. There was much bitterness and pain, coupled with an acute lack of understanding. At one point in the exchange the husband spoke up in obvious exasperation: "I've given you everything", he said to his wife. "I've given you a new home. I've given you a new car and all the clothes you can wear. I've given you....". And he went on to list all kinds of things. When he had ended, the wife said sadly: "That much is true, John. You have given me everything... but yourself".

By contrast, God has given his very self: he has given us his Son.

“The Grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all”.

To Cretans as indeed to others living in a culture dominated by Greek philosophy, this message of grace was revolutionary. For according to the Greek philosophers of that day, love for the unlovable was just not on.

The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, once said: *"Only he who is deserving of love can be loved"*. Similarly Plato once said: *"Love is for the lovely"*.

But God in his grace loved us even when **“while we were still sinners”** (Rom 5.8).

No wonder Paul in his great paean of praise speaks of God **‘lavishing’** (Eph 1.8) his grace upon us.

Tonight we come to celebrate the grace of God – no expense was spared when God sent Jesus to our world.

4. A HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO YOU ALL!

“The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to ALL”

God's grace – God's salvation in Jesus – is for every man and woman, every boy and girl.

It doesn't matter who you are or what you have done, God wants you to have a 'happy Christmas' in the deepest sense of that phrase.

For God has you in view when his saving grace appeared.

In the immediate context of our text, where Paul has just been speaking to slaves, he may have in mind that God's grace is for all, whatever our social standing.

Or in a letter written to Cretans, who were a much disdained and despised group of people, Paul may have in mind that God's grace is for all, whatever our background. For as Paul wrote to Timothy: **"God our Saviour... wants everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth"** (1 Tim 2.3,4).

There are no limits to the saving grace of God.

The Babe of Bethlehem is the Saviour of the world

The Christ of Calvary stretched out his arms on that cruel cross to encompass the whole, wide world.

We may set limits as to whom we give presents & to whom we send cards, but God sets no limits!

5. YES PLEASE!

God has taken the initiative and has loved us beyond our deserving.

In Jesus he has shown us his grace – **"His grace has appeared bringing salvation to all"**. But there is nothing automatic about this salvation.

God may want everybody to be saved – but he does not force his gift of love on us. He awaits our response.

We must say 'Yes' to God, and we do say as we give ourselves back to him in love and gratitude.

Grace, it has been said means '*all of him for me*'; and faith means '*all of me for him*'.

God has offered his all for you – will you offer your all to him?

Will you say 'Yes please' – and mean it?

Let me encourage you to respond to God's grace and experience the good news of Christmas.