

January 13, 2013

Epiphany 1

"The Kindness of God Saves Us"

TITUS 3:4-7

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Your life on this earth is filled with opportunities to show kindness and love to other people. Your life is also filled with opportunities to receive acts of kindness and love from other people. Take a notebook such as this. Write down in the front each time you have an opportunity to show kindness to people. Then start writing from the back each time you are shown kindness from others. As 2013 progresses you would be amazed at how quickly this notebook will fill up. You will realize how richly blessed you are to show kindness and also richly blessed to be shown kindness.

In the words just read to you, we hear that our God shows us kindness and love. There is so much evidence of God's kindness in your life from the clothes you are wearing, the food you ate for breakfast, and the home that kept you warm last night, the Christian friends and family members who care about you. The supreme evidence of God's kindness is the way he saves you. That's the thought we see in the words of our God that are before us this morning. God's kindness saves us in three ways. He gives us the blessing of righteousness through his Son. He gives us the blessing of baptism. He gives us the hope of eternal life.

The kindness of God declares us righteous through Jesus

"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not by because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." It says that the love of God our Savior appeared. The Greek word for "appear" is the word *epiphaino* from which we get the word Epiphany. The supreme evidence of God's love and kindness shows itself in the way Jesus lived on this earth as the sinless Son of God. The heavenly Father said of Jesus at his baptism: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Everything about Jesus' life was pleasing to the heavenly Father including the perfect sacrifice that would be made on the cross for the sin of the world. The Holy Spirit came down in the form of dove pointing to Jesus as the Christ and the place we need to place our hope of being declared righteous before God. The exit signs in front of our church point out where to escape in case of fire. At Jesus' baptism, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit show tremendous kindness to us as they point to Jesus as the place to go to escape the judgment to come.

We are not saved by righteous things that we do. We are saved by God's mercy. "He saved us not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." It is utterly impossible to be saved by righteous things we do because our righteous will never

measure up to what a holy and perfect God expects of us. In the verse previous to the words of our text the Apostle Paul has this to say about all of us. "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We live in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another." Wow! These are strong words.

I cannot find any righteousness in myself that is worthy of God saying, "I accept you and love you." As much as you try to love people and show them kindness, there are flashes of anger that suddenly well up inside of you that are so humbling and so degrading. We do have good moments when we show kindness to people. We are thankful for these shining moments. Even these great moments become tarnished with evil thoughts when we become focused on ourselves and how good we are.

This past week I had an opportunity to show kindness to one of the pastors who was attending our monthly circuit meeting in Thousand Oaks. As we were waiting for others to arrive for lunch, I notice a dollar bill lying on the parking lot. Upon further examination it was not a dollar bill, or a ten dollar bill but a hundred dollar bill. Pastor Proeber and I waited around for ten minutes to see if anyone would claim the money. There was no way to locate the person who lost the money. Rather than keep the money, I gave it to one of our younger pastors who had some financial needs. Could such an act of kindness earn God's favor? No, because it was not perfect. The next day the thought went through my mind, "I could have used that money to buy a little ipod that could let me listen to music or books while working out on the elliptical machine." How often even our best moments of kindness fall short of God's glory.

I need to be saved by a righteousness outside of myself that is found not in me but in God's Son and so do you. "God saved us not by righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy." Oh, don't you love that word mercy. Jesus had compassion on people. They came to him for help and cried out to him, "Lord have mercy on me." Here is how Romans 5 describes this mercy of our God that saves us through Jesus. "You see at just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly die, but God demonstrated his love for us in this: While we were sinners Christ died for us."

The kindness of God gives us the blessing of baptism

Now let's take this kindness of God that saves to another level as we look at how we are not only saved through Jesus but also through our baptism. "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior." Notice it says that God saves us through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit. God uses baptism to bring Christ to us and create faith in Jesus.

Every reference in the Bible to Baptism makes it clear that Baptism is a blessing that God brings into our lives. Paul's letter to the Galatians tells us, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Romans 6 says that we are buried with Christ and rise with him through our baptism. Jesus' baptism was different from our Baptism. When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, he was washed with water from the Jordan River. Then the Holy Spirit came down on him. When water is placed on us and we are baptized

in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Faith is created. It is the washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.

"What is Baptism?" Do an internet search on that question and you will find those who say that Baptism is an ordinance, something you do to show your loyalty and faithfulness to the Lord. One popular Southern California pastor who believes baptism is an ordinance says it is like a wedding ring, a visible reminder of your inclusion in God's family. Do we get baptized just to show we are the bride of Christ or does baptism actually make us the bride as it creates faith to believe? Ephesians 5 says of our baptism and being the bride of Christ, "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with water through the word." Thus I can say that the blood of Jesus cleanses me from all sin. I can also say that Baptism cleanses me from sin because it connects and brings me the cleansing blood of Christ. Jesus saves us. Faith saves us. Baptism saves us.

God has been so good to us when he gave us the blessing of Holy Baptism. When my mother was dying, I told her, "Mom, you have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." She had a smile on her face when she heard these words because Baptism brings us Christ. It creates faith. It is something that God does for us. We can recall what our baptism means for us not just when we face death, but also as we face the challenges of life. The words are clear, "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit."

The kindness of God gives the hope of eternal life

We see God's kindness to us in the past through the perfect life Jesus lived for us. We see the kindness of our God in the present blessing of Holy Baptism. We also see the kindness of our God in the future plans he has for us. We are told, "So that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

We are heirs of eternal life. Perhaps you have received an inheritance at some time in your life. It may have been your mother or your father who left some money for you. We are justified by God's grace. That means we are declared not guilty. That gives us the privilege of being God's children and heirs of the eternal life he has given us.

God in his mercy and kindness to you is preparing a special inheritance for you after you leave this life. Jesus said in John 14, "I going to prepare a place for you." In John 17 he prayed to his Father, "O Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." Your Savior will someday let you experience the love that he has had with his heavenly Father from all eternity. Here is what Peter says about this inheritance that is waiting for us. "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you."

There used to be a bumper sticker that read, "Practice random acts of kindness." It is a joy to do random acts of kindness, but also a joy to carefully plan out acts of kindness such as gifts, birthday parties, meals, or nice things we enjoy doing for people we love. Your

God is very carefully planning out your inheritance for you. In the hymn Amazing Grace we sing these words, "When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun. We've not less days to sing God's praise, Then when we first begun. In heaven we will have an eternity to enjoy what our God has in his kindness has carefully planned for us.

The Lord is allowing us to show kindness to people in everything we do. He is allowing us to also experience kindness from people who care about us and love. All these acts of human kindness are daily reminders of the great kindness our God has shown to us by giving us Jesus, giving us our baptism and giving us an inheritance in heaven. Amen.