

A few months ago, Robyn and I went to Hungry Jacks. My problem is, the burger I used to order, they don't make that one any more. And so I had to actually think about what I was going to order. And I walked into the shop, and here's a picture of a new burger: Roadhouse Whopper. And I said to myself, "Michael, I reckon that's it." ...

And so Robyn ordered me a Roadhouse Whopper, and I went outside and found a table for us, and eagerly waited because I was really hungry and my Roadhouse Whopper, (double bacon, cheese & special sauce) was on its way...

Do you suppose the meal I got, was anything like that picture??? Nothing like it... When the burger box arrived, it was tiny and I thought, "Man, they must've filled that up" ... Hang on... There's only one meat patty there – the picture shows two...

And so I went to the counter and said, "You only put one patty on this."

Well, you only ordered one patty.

No, I ordered a roadhouse whopper, and the picture shows two patties...

No, if you want 2 patties, you've got to order the 2nd patty and pay extra for the 2nd patty...

Now, knowing my rights as a consumer, I could've taken it further,, but given that Jesus said, "... if anyone takes your shirt, let him have your coat as well" ... I thought, a burger – I'll just let it go. And so I returned to our table, quite disappointed... ...

What about you? Have you ever been disappointed with something??? Waiting for something that was promised, but when it turned up, it was nothing like it was supposed to be???

- Burger didn't look like the poster;
- Boyfriend didn't turn out to be a nice guy;
- Holiday at the Sunshine Coast where it rained every day;
- New car that didn't give the fuel economy it was supposed to;
- The highly rated movie that sent you to sleep...

We all get disappointed – When what was promised, is nothing like what we get...

Well, as a Christian, I am certain — that eternal life in Christ Jesus, is exactly as promised. Our God, **who never lies**, has promised us this. He promised it before the ages began, and at just the right point in history, Jesus came; He suffered and died on the cross, and He rose again. And at just the right point in time, the word (the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ) began to be preached, (right across the world) and it is continuing to be preached.

And as the word of God is preached today, the truth of the Gospel is “manifested” (revealed, comes alive) in the words of the preacher, and in the heart and the mind and the life of the hearer.... God never lies. He can be depended upon, entirely. Our Lord is completely trustworthy.

I've given today's message the title: "Keeping the trustworthy faith, the common faith."

- Keeping the Gospel that we preach, true to God's Word. "Keeping the trustworthy faith, the common faith."

Paul's calling as an apostle, and the very purpose of this letter, is for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness,² in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began....

The trouble is, sometimes the Gospel that is promised, gets changed into something else. And that's what's at play, here in this letter.

So, let me set the scene:

Today we're beginning our new series on Titus. It's only going to be a short series (only 3 chapters, and we're doing the whole of Chapter 1 today).

So Paul is writing a letter to Titus. We've been studying what's known as the Pastoral Epistles. We've covered 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy. The first letter he wrote to Timothy, he wrote it from up in Macedonia (N Greece); And then this letter, he then wrote to Titus, and he wrote it from either Macedonia, or somewhere between Macedonia and Nicopolis, because that's where he wanted Titus to catch up

with him. And then finally, he wrote 2nd Timothy (which we've just completed) while he was in prison in Rome.

Who is Titus?

Well, Titus was a very trusted fellow missionary of Paul's. He describes him as “**my true child in a common faith**”. Having a common faith, is what makes us closer than family. When you're in another town, and you visit another church, and you realise “These people and I, we have a common faith – we share the one Lord and Saviour.” Instantly, you know you've found a home...

Now, I've been to a few churches, and they have “**a**” faith, but it's not “**the**” faith – it's not the common faith... And it's not the same – you don't have that sense of belonging, and there's a reason for that – it's because it's not a common faith.

Anyway, Titus had a good solid, grounded faith. And Paul used to deploy Titus to trouble spots. So, when the church in Corinth was running amuck, he sent Titus to sort them out. And when they visited Crete, Paul realised “This place is in a mess. I'd better leave Titus here to sort them out.”

So that's where he is – Titus is in Crete, when he gets this letter from Paul.

What do we know about Crete?

Crete is an island which was part of the Roman Empire. It was quite a large island in the Mediterranean sea, SE of Greece. (almost 20% bigger than New Zealand).

What about the people? Well, the description isn't so flattering.

And the things that Paul says here, let's face it, if he said it today, he'd get himself into a lot of trouble. Facebook and Twitter would explode as the keyboard warriors accused him of being a racist and he'd be cancelled for sure...

Paul quoted one of Crete's own philosophers (Most likely Epimenides), who said "**Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons**" (He was a Cretan, and he said that about his own people) and Paul says, "That's what they say about themselves, and it's jolly-well true."

They're:

- not truthful;
- evil;
- wild; and
- just looking out for themselves

And today, people would jump up and down if we dared to give a broad-brush description like that of any culture.

But you know what: an honest critique of our culture – an honest critique of any culture, would probably say something similar... In every culture of the world, in the light of the Gospel, and compared to the light and goodness of the Kingdom of God, every culture is found ‘wanting’, and we all stand condemned...

And that is the wonderful levelling, and life-giving message of the Gospel – We are all sinners – we all need a saviour... And Jesus is the saviour of all who hold to the common faith.

Now, the issue in Crete, is some had **departed** from the common faith. Within the church, Paul says: **there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers**

Basically, it wasn't only a few – (he uses the word “many”) claimed to have knowledge and were teaching a whole lot of rot, and they were upsetting people with what they taught (whole families).

The Gospel as it was promised, was being corrupted... And it seems that they were concentrating on religious observances (and the rules of men) rather than grace by faith, and living out our faith in Godly living.

How do we know that? Well, he especially draws attention to “those who were of the circumcision party” – What’s that???

Sounds like a rather painful party, doesn't it...

The early church, grew up out of Jewish roots. Jesus was a Jew; The Twelve apostles were Jews; Paul was a Jew... And the sign of being a Jew (for men) was circumcision... But when the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles (non-Jews), they started becoming Christians... And so the church had a question to struggle with, "If these people become Christians, do they also have to become 'Jews'?"

- be circumcised;
- keep religious laws and regulations;
- stop eating pork
- keep the sabbath...

And the Apostles got together and they nussed it out, and they came to the conclusion, "No". The mark of being a Christian, is being filled with the Holy Spirit. And when the gentiles became Christians, it was **evident** that they **were** filled with the Holy Spirit... And so, if God affirms their salvation by living in the believer, being circumcised to fulfill a religious custom or obligation, was hardly necessary.

And we can see (especially in the writings of Paul), that the purpose of the law (customs and regulations) was to restrain an **unspiritual** person. But once you become a Christian, and the Holy Spirit is living inside of us, the **spiritual** person will live righteously; do good; be holy and Godly,, not because the Law requires it, but because God living in us, makes it the natural thing to do. And thus we meet what the Law was trying to achieve (Godly living).

But not everybody was happy with that. There was a whole bunch of people (known as the circumcision party), who would teach, “You’re a deficient Christian because you’re not a Jew and you’re not circumcised.”

And let me tell you, it’s not only upsetting – it’s devastating to be told that because you don’t have a particular gift; or because you don’t have the right heritage; or because you don’t eat the right sort of food, you’re a deficient Christian....

The way Jesus interacted with the religious leaders of His day, it’s very clear that religious observances and customs and practices is not what will make one holy...

And so Paul says to Titus: **Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,** ¹⁴ not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

Alright, if God has made us pure, what we eat doesn’t make us impure. It’s how we live that matters.

And if the Gospel message, is a Gospel of Grace and faith in the Lord Jesus, then to add to this, the rules of men, is to teach what ought not to be taught...

You know, sometimes we might feel that if we get a bit more religious, or if we can lay down a few extra rules, and jump

through a few more hoops, we might become better Christians...

But those who teach that, Paul says are:

- insubordinate;
- empty talkers;
- deceivers;
- their minds and their consciences are defiled;
- they say they know God, but, by what they do, they deny God.
- They are detestable
- disobedient
- unfit for any good work

That's pretty scathing, isn't it?

So Titus' role was 2-fold:

1. To pull them into line; and
2. To appoint elders, who will continue to keep "the **trustworthy** faith" the "common faith".

BTW, that's one of the main duties for an elder in the church – to ensure that what is taught in the church, is the honest, godly, trustworthy faith – the common faith. Not some new novelty, but the true, life-giving Gospel of Christ Jesus.

And so Paul gives us a description, of what elders should be like.

Now, I didn't plan it this way, but God obviously did, that today (after church) we're going to have our AGM, and we're going to be voting on elders (One re-nomination, and one new elder).

And the main duty of an elder, is to make sure, that what we teach, and how we live, is the genuine, trustworthy faith. That we continue to teach a gospel of grace, and that we continue to live out this grace in holiness. And that we never allow a message of religious customs, or rules of men, or whatever myth one may want to add, that we never allow that...

So, we're going to be learning about Elders.

Now, for our folk in Cecil Plains, this should be quite fresh in your minds because when I visited last Sunday, we were up to 1 Timothy 3, which talks about the qualifications for an overseer or Bishop. For the rest of us, we're going to have to think back to May, because that's when we were in 1 Timothy 3. And we discovered that the qualifications for an Overseer or Bishop, are primarily about "Spiritual Maturity".

And the same goes for the qualifications of an Elder. It's **mostly** about Spiritual maturity.

An Elder should be:

- above reproach;
- If they're married, one wife is enough;
- his children are to be believers (or faithful) and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination

1 Timothy 3:4 probably says it better: (ESV) ⁴ **He must**

manage his own household well, with all dignity
keeping his children submissive,

In other words, it's really about how the Elder controls and disciplines his own children. If he can't manage his own kids, he's probably going to have a bit of trouble managing a church if it runs amuck...

You see, an elder or an overseer, is acting as God's Steward. The church is God's household, and the Steward manages God's household. And so an elder or overseer:

- must be above reproach (he says it a 2nd time);
- Not arrogant;
- not quick-tempered;
- not a drunkard; or
- violent; or
- greedy;

- but hospitable;
- a lover of good;
- self-controlled;
- upright;
- holy;
- disciplined

Alright, this is very-much describing "Spiritual maturity".

And in V9, he gets to the crux of the matter for Crete:

⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught

Why's that so important?

so that he may be able to **give** instruction in **sound doctrine** and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

It's about "Keeping the trustworthy faith, the common faith".

Paul was reminding Titus, that when he appoints elders, they should be Godly men, who are spiritually mature and hold to the trustworthy word of the Gospel,, and that they know sound doctrine (Christianity as it's meant to be) well enough, that they can instruct others in what it means to be a Christian.... But he's also reminding Timothy that for the Gospel to continue as the true gospel

- a gospel of grace
- demonstrated with righteous conduct and holy living;
- a gospel that doesn't wander off into rules of men or religious regulations

For that to continue, God's stewards (elders appointed in the church), need to hold the line. And sometimes they will need to take authority, and rebuke those who contradict what is true...

God never lies. The gospel must be as it is promised... The church must never become like a Hungry Jacks hamburger picture – promising something great, and ending up being disappointing.

The cross is enough. In the Christian church, we promise, "Come all ye sinners. Be saved by grace and faith in Jesus".

We teach that by the Holy Spirit, we then live lives of righteousness and holiness, thus fulfilling the requirements of the Law...

And if we try to add anything to that, like “You have to keep this religious regulation or you have to have this particular gift, or you have to worship on a particular day of the week”,,, otherwise you’re deficient as a Christian,, that would be detestable...

So, let’s keep the trustworthy faith, the common faith, because it is excellent.

Let’s pray:

Heavenly Father,

We thank you that Your Word is true and sure and guaranteed.

In You, we can never be disappointed.

We give You glory,

because we know our great hope of eternal life, is sure, because You never lie.

And Lord, we thank You for Your beautiful Gospel.

Uncorrupted;

We thank You that Jesus did everything necessary for our salvation, on the cross.

Lord, forgive us for whenever we've tried to add something to this.

Forgive us for when we have tried to live by religious rules and regulations, and especially for when we've thrust them upon others.

Lord, may we marvel in the joy of salvation in Christ Jesus...

And Lord, as we appoint elders to this church today, we pray that You would raise up men who would be stewards in Your church. Loving Your Gospel as the Gospel is, Upholding it; and rebuking those who would contradict it.

Lord, may we be a people who are not empty-talkers; May we always live what we believe.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.