**Before & After:** *Our Transformation Story*

Titus 3:3-8

**Introduction:** Transformation stories are intriguing and we tend to gravitate towards them. Weight loss, skin care, house renovation, and car restoration have all had a place in our culture, our social media pages, and have their own TV shows (and products). We love watching the before picture of an overweight person with acne living in a shack and driving a rusted out car turn into a model with perfect skin, living in a newly renovated mansion driving a restored classic. It is inspiring to see this kind of change, motivating us that we too can do the same as these ordinary people. We love the fact that no matter how bad something starts, Bob Harper or Chip and Joanna Gaines can turn it into something healthy and beautiful.

This “before and after” story is all through the Bible, since the core message of redemptive history is that God is restoring what was broken and dead into something alive and whole, changing our ugly condition into something beautiful. Our stories of redemption are told through the lens of who we ***were*** and who we ***are now:***

*From slaves to free*

"But thanks be to God, that you **who were once slaves to sin** have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." **Romans 6:17-18a**

*From left out to included*

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And **such were some of you.** But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." **1 Cor. 6:9-11**

*From Death to Life*

"And you **were dead in the trespasses and sins** in which you once walked...But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ." Eph. 2:1, 4-5**

*From living in sin to putting on righteousness*

"In these you too once walked when you **were living in them**. But now you must put them all away, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth." **Col. 3:7-8**

This is our story. We **were** slaves, left out, dead, and living in our sin and **now we are** free, included, alive, and righteous. This morning we **remember, celebrate, and grab motivation** from looking at our own before and after.

**The Before:** Who we *were* (3)

“For we ourselves **were** once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.”

Last week we looked at how we are to interact with the world around us, particularly the **government** and **humanity** that we deal with everyday. Two things were abundantly clear: it is **difficult** to live well in this fallen, broken world and submit under the God established yet fallible government, and **difficult** to be gentle, kind, compassionate, and considerate to those living in a system run by the Prince of the Power of the air. This is why Paul made sure the church at Crete **remembered their *BEFORE*** story.

 **It’s Personal**

***"For we ourselves were once..."*** Paul was not preaching at the church nor at Titus, but was instead including himself in the mix of remembrance, recalling his days before Christ called and changed him. Remember, Paul was on his way to persecute the church that he would later give his life for, seeking to put an end to Christianity because of his own self-righteous narcissism. **Everyone** who knows Christ as their Savior and Lord has a "we ourselves were once" story, whether you were saved this last year or whether your eyes were opened in your younger years. Some of us get deceived into thinking that if we were saved early and never had the testimony of flagrant rebellion it either diminishes our salvation or means we were not as lost as those who battled addiction. If you are here this morning and thinking that no one here can relate to you, know that we are a group of people with a past. No one here is without sin, no one here is perfect, and though we do not stay that way, we ALL can relate at the level of sinful experience what it means to sin and be sinned against. But what was the condition we found ourselves in?

 **It’s Pervasive**

Our before story was one that showed the pervasive effect of sin working in our lives. We all experienced this at varying levels:

* **Godward Rebellion -** *Foolish and Disobedient -* In our before state, we without spiritual understanding and were unwilling to be persuaded to obey God as our greatest joy. Foolishness plays itself out in thinking that satisfaction could be found in what the world can offer, failing to realize that nothing, not any amount of material gain, can fulfill the longing in our heart. Disobedience to God is a reasonable next step, since the height of foolishness says that there is no God (Psalm 14:1).
* **Selfward Delusion -** *Deceived and Enslaved -* But this foolishness leads to full blown deception, talking us down a road of misery. **Sin is enslaving**. What we think is freedom (i.e we can do whatever we want with our body, sexuality, money, time, etc) in effect imprisons us in our own passions and lusts. What satisfies yesterday no longer does today, so more is needed. That is NOT FREEDOM! We are convinced that our way is right, that what we do will make us happy, so we live in our delusion, glorying in our misery that has been marketed as freedom. This is the person that hears the truth, says they believe, and yet refuses to actually live in light of it.
* **Manward Oppression -** *Malice, envy, and hatred -* This faux freedom leads us to a bitter life, blaming others, God, and anyone we can think of that we got the raw end of the deal. We are dissatisfied with how life turned out, we point out how we were hosed by others, and now everyone else seems to have it better than us (and that's not fair!). We begin to **hate** everything: ourselves, others, God, and by living that kind of life of unforgiveness, we are hated by others.

Here's the question to consider at this point: does this describe your past or your present? Are you living in disobedient deception that has only produced misery? God offers not only forgiveness, but newfound righteousness and joy, a type of satisfaction that we have always longed for. You can be free, you can put your fear, misery, and hatred behind you. And God has done all the work for you.

 **It’s Preparatory**

Finally, we consider the purpose, the reason that we are to remember our past. This is not to wallow in the past as if we were still identified with it. But our past helps us in the present and future in two massive ways:

* **Humility -** The description of our past is presented without transition. The Bible has no transitional steps between who we **were** and who we **are in Christ.** In other words, it was not "you were \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but you found a way to move toward God, and so He saw that movement and saved you". We moved from wretched sinfulness, hatred and envy, to sons and daughters. We went from enemies to friends, from condemned to those who will reign. And there was NOTHING WE DID TO EARN THIS! Whenever we forget our past, pride will find a breeding ground. Whenever we think that we have somehow done something, or that we were not ***that bad***, we diminish the work of Christ by elevating our condition.
* **Compassion -** When we remember our past, we turn from reacting against our enemies or those that are opposed to us to having compassion on them. We look at a lost spouse, co-worker, family member, or neighbor through a lens of the gospel rather than our own sense of justice. We remember that **lost people inexplicably act like lost people**. We are the ones that understand why. Having a healthy remembrance of our past condition allows us to respond in grace, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness to those who are just like we were, and **but by God's grace would still be true of us.**

**The Initiator:** Who God *is* (4)

“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared…”

In every great restoration story, there has to be someone who initiates. Perhaps it was a show runner, a relative, or someone who sees a jewel in a bunch of rust covered metal. But in our story of "before and after", the initiator is clear: its God alone that initiates. We had no motivation, no ability, no will to move from our fallen condition to change. He had to do it. Notice that Paul contrasts who **we were** with who God is, His character being consistent and never changing.

 **His Character**

He is by nature **good, kind, and generous** (the word is literally "philanthropy"). God is just, He is wrathful, fearful, jealous, and righteous. But He is simultaneously loving, gracious, and merciful. We get into trouble when we try to define anyone flatly, in a single snapshot or experience rather than getting a well rounded view of who they are. God is not defined by what ***we think of Him or what we think He should be***. He instead presents Himself to us exactly how He is. His goodness and kindness is shown as He initiates salvation with those who were stuck in their lostness.

 **His Move**

The first move in our salvation was when God's kindness and goodness appeared in the person of Jesus Christ. This was agreed upon before the world began where Christ willingly agreed to condescend from glory to become a man, a servant, and die on a cross to save those who could not save themselves.

**The Work:** What God *did* (5-6)

“…He saved us, **not because of works** done by us in righteousness, but according to His own **mercy**

 **He Saved**

No sweeter words have ever been penned. In three words, our past is redeemed, our present is changed, and our future is secure. He saved us. He saved us because He is good, generous, and kind. He saved us because He could, because He is loving, and because He purposed to do so. He saved us because it was His plan all along, to redeem a people for Himself. This is the main verb, the main idea of this whole glorious sentence of our salvation. Salvation is a product of what's in God's heart, not what is in ours. *But why did He save us?* Paul explains the basis of why God saved us:

 **The non-factor**

It is difficult to accept grace because we always want to contribute to something given to us. We desire to reciprocate, whether its an invitation to dinner or thank you note. We want to earn our place, contributing to a position or placement. If we hurt someone, we try to make up for it. If we let someone down, we try to do enough to try to lessen the disappointment. This plagues each one of us and dies hard in our thinking. Every world religion has expressed a **works based** contribution to whatever salvation they offer, whether its good works, giving your life or contributing money, doing works to earn salvation speaks to each of our flesh (which is why works based religion is so popular). But here is a **clear, definitive, absolute statement** concerning our contribution to our salvation: **it had nothing to do with our works done in righteousness!** This is the best news you will ever hear my friend. None of us are righteous since we are all born into sin. We are NOT RIGHTEOUS, so there is NO WAY we could ever do enough earn our way back to God. In fact, the ONLY thing we could contribute was our own filthiness: "***We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment*** (filthy rag)...*there is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you." (Isa. 64:6-7).* What we thought would help our cause only cemented the judgment that we deserved. The idea that we hope our good outweighs our bad someday as we stand before God is not only a pipe dream, it is deception from the deepest pit.

 **The basis**

What then, was the basis of our salvation and God's initiation? His mercy alone. Where our disobedience and sin merited His wrath, His mercy held back what we deserved so that His grace could be dispensed. The point is that God would be wholly just to send every single person who ever lived into eternal judgment. However, His mercy pities us in our miserable condition. His mercy was His own, as He considered it according to His own nature, not some other measure that we created. Instead of laying waste of us in judgment, He in turn **lavished grace on us** (Eph. 1:8).

 **He Transformed**

by the washing of **regeneration** and **renewal** of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior…”

 **The joint force of the Godhead**

How did God save us? When we only focus on the fact that He saved us from judgment, we miss the many facets of salvation, like the cuts of a diamond. Notice that God brought about our salvation with the joint force of the Godhead: His work through Jesus Christ our Savior and the Holy Spirit, the distinctive persons who each had roles in our salvation. There is no lesser person of the Trinity as each played an equally important yet unique part.

 **Inner transformation**

The first work of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit is to **wash us clean.** This is what brings forgiveness of sin, allowing us to be reconciled with the Father (Eph. 4:32). We were washed (1 Cor. 6:11), which meant it was something done to us, not something we could do ourselves. God washes us from the **inside out**, bringing us a new heart with new motives and desires. This is the reality of what was promised in the Old Testament (Ezek. 36:25-27), that the Holy Spirit would change God's people from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh. The washing is done by the blood of Christ, scrubbing us clean, and the Word (Eph. 5:26). This washing deals with our past sin, our guilt, shame, the sins we did and what was done to us, and sets us up for a new beginning.

 **Rebirth**

God did not just forgive us and leave us alone. He created in us and for us a completely new beginning, a rebirth of a new life. We are a new creation: the old has passed away and the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17). The implications of this rebirth is that we are no longer defined by our past and we no longer have to live in bondage to it. For those here this morning dealing with the shame of the past, or anger over what happened to you in the past, you can know that you are free from that in salvation, since God has washed you and made you new.

 **Renewal**

This leads us to be renewed, restored in a right relationship with God. We are now able to obey because we WANT to, and we have the ability to obey because we have the POWER to, and we have joy in obedience because Christ GAVE it to us (John 15:11). Whenever we are faced with seemingly impossible situations that call us to respond in love, compassion, kindness, even when we are being treated unjustly and defrauded, we now have the ability to respond in joy because God has remade us completely.

**The After:** How we *are* (7-8)

“…**so that** being **justified** by His grace, we might become **heirs** according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to **devote** themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.”

 **A New Declaration** – *Declared Righteous*

What is our "after" story? We have been declared righteous in Christ since He has taken our sin on Himself on the cross. He not only took our place but gave us His righteousness, meaning we have something foreign that we never had before. We have the righteousness of Christ in us so that we can live to God's glory. This rids every believer of every excuse we'd make of a lack of response of obedience. Christ's righteousness overcomes our laziness, lack of forgiveness, our pride, selfishness, and lack of compassion. We stand righteous because of the grace poured out for us.

 **A New Identity** *– Heirs of eternal life*

But we have not only received a new declaration, we get a new identity. We are **heirs, a new reality of a secure future.** We are now part of God's family, giving us an unshakable hope that no matter what we face for the rest of our time on earth, whether cancer or criticism, loss or pain, we have a life eternal awaiting. Salvation changes who we are to the point that we no longer are constrained by our upbringing, the way our parents treated us, the choices we made in youth and unbelief, or the heinous thoughts and desires that we hope no one will ever find out. God knew all of that, and Christ still died for us. Even when we wrestle with the "hows" and "whys" of God allowing things to happen to us, we remember that God was pleased to crush His Son to bring us to glory.

 **A New Devotion** – *Devoted to good works*

This is the crux of the message of Titus, since its truly the center of the New Testament and the marrow of the whole Bible. Titus was to **insist on these things**, making sure this message was primary in his teaching and life. This is not a message that we ever move away from. But we continue to come back to the truth of the fact that God saves us, because He loves us and by His mercy and grace declared us righteous. This frees us up to **devote ourselves to good works.** These works do not earn us anything with God, but we desire to please Him. These works are not trying to save the world, but rather display to the world the goodness of God. These works reflect the fact that this world is not our home so we can freely give of our resources and selves since we have something far greater and better stored up for us in the future. These works point to the gospel, that salvation is found in Christ alone, which leads us to joy in this broken and fallen world. So we seek to stay focused, to doggedly determine to cling to the cross, to magnify Jesus, and glorify God the Father. This is perhaps the most important message you'll ever hear, and the message we all need to hear. So we conclude this series like we started, standing in one voice, speaking together this revolutionary truth:

*"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

**Titus 3:4-7**