

Zealous – Titus 2:11-14
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
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INTRODUCTION

Can you think of anything in life that excites you so much you would break into a run to get it? That you would wear yourself out for and endure pain and great personal costs to chase after it. When I was in high school, I really wanted badly to win the Alaska state cross country meet. No one at our small Christian school had ever won a state championship, and I wanted to be the first. *I was definitely willing to break into a run, literally, to chase after this goal of mine.*

Now every year my coach would ask each person on the cross-country team to set a goal for the year, write it on a piece of paper, and then hand it to him. He would use that goal to guide how he trained us and how hard he made us work. My freshman year goal was to be in the top ten at state. Having that goal helped me train hard and work hard and really challenge myself to reach it. And my coach focused all my training on achieving that goal. I took 8th place that year at state. Goal achieved. My sophomore year goal was to be in the top five. I took 5th place that year at state. My junior year goal was to win it all. I only made it to 3rd place.

So you can imagine that as I entered my senior year of high school, I was more *zealous* than ever to do whatever was needed to take that top spot. My goal was the same, and this was my last chance to pull it off. I put all my energies into training hard, starting very early in the summer and running harder and longer and more intense than I ever had before. And it turned out to be a great season. I was undefeated in all my races leading up to that final state meet. And as we got ready for that final race, my coach and I spent a lot of time on strategy and thinking through the best approach to the race. This was complicated by the appearance of a mystery runner whom the Anchorage newspaper had written a big article on and presented as the favorite to win. So this made us a bit uneasy. We debated as to whether I should just go out and run my race and try to go for a fast time, or whether I should stick close to this new runner and bide my time, making sure I didn't overdo it and then get passed at the end.

We eventually decided that the second strategy was the best choice since this was my last chance to win state and it would be safer to be conservative than to overdo it and run out of steam at the end. To be honest though, my coach suspected I would ignore the plan and just take off to run my own race. So he was quite pleased when he spotted me right on the shoulder of my competitor after the first mile. And that's where I stayed until the last three-quarters of a mile when I started pulling away from him and picking up speed for the finish. The plan worked out. In the end I finished 20 seconds ahead of him and was overjoyed to have finally reached that goal I'd been chasing after with *zeal* for so many years.

This is just one example of how we can become very *zealous* in chasing after things we want in this world...so *zealous* that we're willing to expend lots of energy and time and effort and pain and hardship to pursue them. I would guess that every one of you here today can think of something in your life that you've wanted so badly, that's so important to you, that you've been willing to sacrifice lots of things in order to have it or to do it. Well, did you know God has something specific in mind for his children to be *zealous* about...something he intends us to pursue with lots of thought, energy and training during our life on earth?

You've may have noticed by now that I've used the words, *zealous* and *zeal*, several times already. And, in fact, this message is called, "*Zealous*." So if you noticed that word being repeated, good job! You're paying attention. I want to talk today about what it is that God teaches his people to be *zealous* about. Because God actually has in mind things for his people to do and get excited about and spend their time on and find pleasure in as they walk with him. When we come to salvation in Christ, through repentance of sin and faith in him, God has a new life planned for us here and now...one which is very different from the way the rest of the world is living...but one which is also so much better and so much more fulfilling and satisfying and effective. It's actually what we really want. And that new life involves us being *zealous* about something.

THE MEANING OF ZEALOUS

Well, before we go any further, let's make sure we all understand what *zealous* and *zeal* mean. And to do that we want to look back at the meaning of the

original Greek word in Scripture. The noun form of the word is what we call in English “a zealot.” Have you ever heard of a zealot? A zealot is a person who is passionate and fully committed to a certain viewpoint and will not compromise on it and will go to any lengths to promote it and put it into practice. We often think of a zealot in a bad sense, because often times in world history wars have been fought and many people have died because a crazy zealot who was into himself and his own views led a group of people to harm themselves or others in support of him and his view of the world.

But really, a zealot who is zealous about God and his purposes is a very good thing. Jesus was a zealot. Zeal for his Father and his Father’s house consumed him and caused him to take bold action when his Father was being misrepresented and his house was being polluted. Being zealous is only a problem when we get zealous about ourselves or other false gods or false teaching, or when zeal becomes a power trip where we try to control other people and make them do what we want them to do.

Interestingly, the Greek word translated zealous, is connected with the word “run.” That’s one of the reasons I opened with that running illustration. When used as a verb the word carries with it the picture of running after something with all of our energy. The idea is that something becomes so important to us that we will break into a run to pursue it, rather than just lolly-gagging or slowly walking after it. We’ll energetically and at great cost to ourselves pursue something that we’re zealous about.

I think we have a pretty good idea now of what it means to be zealous for something. So what would you say you’re zealous about in your life right now? What captures your attention and fills your time and causes you to make great sacrifices to pursue it and/or obtain it? What are you willing to run and train and discipline yourself for?

THE ZEAL OF GOD’S PEOPLE

Well, today I want to share with you a passage of Scripture from Titus chapter 2, verses 11 through 14...a passage that reveals a simple, yet radical picture of what God wants his people to be zealous about...what he intends us to be spending our time on and doing and pursuing and finding delight in as we seek him and his

kingdom above all. I love these 4 verses in Titus because they present a concise, stripped-down picture of what God has done for us and how that's meant to transform our daily lives and how we live them from now until Jesus returns in glory and power. So let's begin. We're going to talk through them one at a time. Verse 14 say this:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,

This is what changed everything. God's mercy and grace and underserved favor toward all human beings were revealed in great glory in the person of Jesus Christ, God's Son. ***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth...For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*** (John 1:14,16-17).

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,... Every person now has the opportunity to be forgiven of their sin, freed from the wrath of God, and living at peace with God in his presence and filled up with his power, through simple repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and his work on the cross. And for those who accept this grace of God through Jesus Christ, a radical new life begins as they're born again spiritually and receive God's Holy Spirit dwelling inside...giving them grace, empowerment, for life and the accomplishing of God's will.

Now as we move on to verse 12, we begin to see what God has in mind for us in our new life with him:

training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,

We see here that our new transformed lives start right now, not just when we get to heaven. In the present age, God is leading us and empowering us to live differently from the rest of the world. His training program for us involves renouncing ungodliness and worldly passions. To renounce is to leave behind, to abandon, to go in the opposite direction. And what we renounce is the way all people live in this world when they've rejected God and the knowledge of

him...the ungodly life. Ungodliness takes all kinds of forms – sin has many shapes and sizes – but the core of it is putting ourselves and what we think we want above all, including God. And when we do that, we become willing to do whatever it takes and say whatever we need to in order to get what we want.

Fortunately we're restrained a bit by our God-given consciences and laws that have been in put in place and by the Holy Spirit keeping evil from getting as bad as it could get, but still the life of ungodliness and worldly passions is the life where we live for ourselves, our pleasures and whatever we think we want, often at the expense of others. But what God has in mind for his saved ones is a life where we take ourselves off the throne and put him there where he belongs, allowing him to teach us how to live, give us what we need, and lead us into his good purposes, learning to live self-controlled, upright, godly lives in the present age. This kind of life becomes possible when we actually trust God and believe his Word and how it tells us to live.

Now as we look at verse 13, we find that God intends our hope to be shifted from this world we're just passing through, to the world and the inheritance he's preparing for us when Jesus Christ returns in glory and power. This is what we've been learning in 1 Peter. And only when our hope is truly set on God and his kingdom and preparing ourselves for eternal life with him...only then will we be able to stop letting the things of this world and our selfish desires run our lives and eat up all our time and energy. Verse 13 says:

waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

Our blessed hope – that which is holding our attention and guiding our lives. What is that hope? It's the return of Christ, when in great glory and power, he and his salvation and his saints are revealed to all the world and we begin to reign with him! Preparing ourselves for that day and inviting others to join us is what God intends to be the focus of our lives.

We've got one more verse to look at, verse 14...a verse which explains why Jesus did what he did for us. Why he gave himself for us on the cross and and what he was seeking to bring about through it. Why did he do it and what was he trying to accomplish? Let's read verse 14:

who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession...

We see two reasons why here. First, he gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness. To redeem is to set free from slavery or from prison. So Jesus gave himself for us on the cross to set us free from all lawlessness. What's lawlessness? 1 John 3:4, says this: ***Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.*** Jesus gave himself for us so we could be set free from slavery to sin...so it wouldn't be our master any longer. Sin is lawlessness because the heart of it is the attitude: *I'm in charge here. I'm going to do whatever I want and whatever makes me feel good and whatever benefits me.* Lawlessness disregards what God says is right and wrong whenever we feel it's necessary to get what we want and we think we can get away with it. Jesus gave himself for us to free us from this way of living life and bring us to simple trust in God that believes his ways are right and good and the best for us...trust that will lead to a willingness to reject those things, those attitude, those actions, we know are wrong and choose God's ways instead.

And the second reason Jesus gave himself for us is to purify for himself a people for his own possession. All people are created by Jesus and for Jesus, even those who haven't yet accepted him. That's why it's such a big deal when they reject him and suppress the truth about him. But for those who do accept him, he leads us to fully embrace this reality. That my life is for Jesus. I exist for him. That's why I'm here. He created me for relationship with him, to walk with him through life as his disciple, his apprentice, his student-in-training, and then to spend eternity in his presence reigning with him. And this life is essential preparation for that future with him.

As we accept Jesus as our Savior through repentance and faith, he makes us white as snow, he purifies us by washing away our sin and clothing us with himself and his righteousness. He gives us credit for his perfect life of obedience to God. We are secure and loved and forgiven and our salvation is forever certain. But he also intends to begin purifying us in our thoughts, our words, our actions during our life on earth. He intends us to begin becoming like him in the way we live our lives. We won't ever reach perfection until he completes the work at his return, but he does expect us to make significant progress by his power and his Word. We've also been seeing this in 1 Peter. Jesus gave himself for us to purify for

himself a people who belong to him, walk with him and live for him right here and now.

Well, any of you following along in your Bibles may have noticed that I left off a final phrase from verse 14. And that's because I wanted it to be the final focus of our message today. It's the phrase that has to do with that "zealous" word I used so many times earlier. You see Jesus gave himself for us to set us free from sin and purify us in both our hearts and our daily lives, but as he does that, he also intends us to become zealous about something. In other words, he has something for us to do and to put our full energies into...similar to how I invested endless time and energy and thought and training to winning the state cross country race. So what is it that Jesus intends his people to be zealous about. Let's read verse 14 again, but this time I'll include the final phrase:

who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Jesus wants his redeemed and purified people to be zealous about good works. A few verses later in Titus, chapter 3, verse 8, this idea is repeated with a different word. Paul says, "...**DEVOTED to good works.**" Zealous and devoted are both very strong words that imply passion and focus and energy. Clearly Jesus has something for us to expend our time and energy and even money on during this life, doesn't he?

Now, good works, by definition, are good actions taken on behalf of and for the benefit of other people. Can you imagine making this statement? "That guy is so wonderful. He is just so devoted to and energetic about doing good works for himself!" That doesn't make sense, does it? Instead, you'd probably be thinking that he's very self-centered and all about himself. Well, in contrast to that, Jesus has a life in mind for each of us who are his children, where we begin to care about other people and take action on their behalf to express the love of Christ to them...the same love and undeserved favor we ourselves have received and are receiving from Christ. The life of a true follower Christ is to be full of good works...not works done to earn God's approval or earn our salvation, but works flowing out of a heart set free from self and surrendering to God and his ways and his good purposes for us...and good works that reveal God and his transforming

power to others so they too can be saved and set free and begin walking with their Creator.

CONCLUSION

Do you see good works in your life right now? Does it register on your daily priorities to show God's grace and love and mercy in practical acts of service and loving words that point the way to Jesus? Are you zealous about good works, like I was zealous about a state championship?

Jesus left us with a great job to do by the power of God's Spirit within us, didn't he? It's called the Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:18-20:

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus is standing with all of his followers. He's given each of us the Holy Spirit dwelling inside us. We're not alone to carry out this task. The One who has all authority in heaven and on earth gives us what we need *as we go*. And as we go our job is to make disciples. Through good works and speaking the words of the gospel, the good news, we are to invite other people to not only believe in Jesus, but also to be his disciples, his apprentices, his students-in-training. People who walk with him and learn from him how to live life like him...people who believe God's Word and obey it like Jesus did.

This is what Jesus intends his people to be zealous about...to be pursuing with all their energy...to be setting goals about...to be training themselves for...to be enduring pain and hardship and great cost to themselves to carry out. He gave himself for us so would live this way! And the joy and fulfillment of being zealous for good works and the making of disciples will be so much better and so much more fulfilling and so much more rewarding than winning the Alaska State Championship. And so much more fulfilling than just living for ourselves. What could be more exciting and fulfilling and joy-giving than taking up the mission our Savior took up...the mission of bringing the best news ever to lost and hopeless

people in both words and action. And God is so committed to giving us everything we need to do this zealously and effectively. He will give us the grace we need as we take up his mission. ***And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work*** (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Knowing this is true, may we say and live with Jesus this amazing calling: ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”*** (Luke 4:18–19a). What could be better than having this job to do by the power of the Holy Spirit? To set people free. To give sight to the blind. To proclaim wonderful, life-giving news. To proclaim God’s grace. That now is the time when every person in the world can receive forgiveness and new life and peace with God through Jesus Christ. What better to be zealous about than this?!