

Organizing the Mission "From Chaos to Order" Titus 1:1-4

Introduction

- [Slide #1] This morning we are starting a new series from Paul's very brief letter to Titus. This letter, Titus, is all about organization. Kind of sounds anal retentive and boring, doesn't it? Like Tupperware for the kitchen or Stanley organizers for the garage Titus is the Real Simple Magazine of New Testament letters. A whole letter devoted to organizing God's people. Fortunately it's not quite as boring as it sounds and what it has to say is extremely timely and relevant for us.
- Paul's letter, just three chapters long, was written to a guy named Titus who was sent by Paul to the island of Crete. Crete is the fourth largest in the Mediterranean Sea just off the southern coast of Greece. Somehow, somehow, in Paul's day, and we don't know how, the good news of Christ crucified reached the people there. They received the message about Christ. They were converted. Their lives changed. Little house churches, little clusters of people kind of like LifeGroups sprouted up to do what Christians do.
- And these little house churches were a crooked mess. Paul says to Titus in **Titus 1:5** *The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished.* The churches were a disorganized, disorderly mess and Titus' job was to straighten that mess out.
- Part of the reason for the disorganization in all these little churches had to do with Cretan culture. Thinking of the culture at large the Cretans were the exact opposite of what we might think of German culture; this highly organized, efficient, precise, well oiled machine. In **Titus 1:12** Paul quotes a Cretan poet by the name of Epimenides, who was himself from Crete, and said about his own people that Cretans are *liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons*. And Paul actually says in **verse 13**, *this testimony is true*. He agrees. The Cretans had a reputation of being idle, corrupt, lax, indifferent.
- Now imagine some of these Cretans becoming Christians. God purchases for himself some from this group of liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons and fashions a church. Who becomes the teacher? The liar or the lazy glutton? Which of the evil brutes are set aside to serve as elders? Do they send out lazy glutton number 1 or lazy glutton number 2 as missionary?
- Imagine these lax and indifferent Christians attempting to gather regularly in homes for worship, prayer, teaching. They almost certainly would have carried with them into their practice and life as the body of Christ the disorganization and laziness and indifference of their culture. Very quickly

you start to get a picture of the situation and the reason for Paul writing. They desperately needed organization.

- So what Paul does is write to Titus about organizing the Cretan Christians in three areas, three domains in which it's really easy to become disorganized, slipshod, and lazy.
- Look at chapter 1. Chapter one is about organization in the church body. Appoint elders, teaching. Flip ahead to chapter 2. Chapter 2 is about organization in the home. You have all these commands for older men, older women, young men, young women. And then chapter 3. The focus now shifts to outside the community of faith. **3:1**. *Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities*. Then, three times the phrase "do what is good" is repeated in chapter 3. Chapter 3 is about organization for the purpose of these house churches doing good in the world around them—in the realm of *rulers and authorities*. Three chapters, three domains needing organization, and not counting today, a three week series.
- The question facing us as we start this series is this, who gives a rip? Why should we, here and now, care whether or not we're organized or disorganized? Here's why. Generally speaking, what Titus faced—disorganization in all these little house churches—that wasn't just a Cretan problem.
- Churches, especially small ones, and we aren't immune, churches are some of the most disorganized, poorly run, poorly coordinated groups of people on the planet. The animal kingdom, ants and bees show more adeptness at order and organization than God's church. You simply won't get anywhere as a group, you won't accomplish anything of significance; you won't achieve something larger than yourself without some kind of coordinated effort, some organization.
- Whether we realize it or not, this is a major issue for us. Especially as we intentionally try to become smaller and decentralize for the purpose of mission. We have to be intentional about adding some flexible structure and organization and order to the good intentions of being on mission with Jesus. We are setting ourselves, if we're not careful, to produce Cretan-like disorganization and disorder.
- That's one reason for caring about what Titus has to say. The other reason is because families are equally disordered and disorganized. This is actually the bigger issue. Too many families, mine included, are just spinning their wheels. We are believers, yes. We are marked by the King as his servants, yes. We are saved by grace, yes. But our families our purposeless, aimless in direction. How in the world can we expect to accomplish significant kingdom work together when the building blocks of the church, families, are in disarray? It starts in the home. Everything good God is leading us to do and accomplish

collectively, together as a church, is dependent upon all those things having already happened in your home and with your family.

- As someone from Grace said to me this week. “Chaos is costly.” Do you know what suffers most when God’s people operate in a disorderly, disorganized fashion? People. The mission. People who need to hear about Jesus. People who need to hear about the cross. People who need to see the love of God by the people of God in action. That’s what suffers. All too frequently, especially in churches our size, needs slip through the cracks, nobody serves, the helping hand isn’t extended because of lack of organization or laziness or indifference or all of the above.
- A great example of organization and order at its best is the example of the list of widows from **1 Timothy 5**. Almost in passing Paul mentions to Timothy not to put any widows under sixty on the list of widows supported by the church. Presumably because the younger widows are still able to support themselves. What this list was, who was on it is less important than the fact that someone in one of the churches was tracking the needs of the widows to make sure they were being taken care of. The church had intentionally ordered itself, it was organized so that needs were being met, people were being taken care of. That’s a fabulous example of organization and order working as it should.
- Again, chaos is costly. And a Cretan-esque, laissez-faire, none of my business, doesn’t concern me, hands-off, I don’t care, lazy, indifferent, disordered, disorganized approach to the Christian life and this thing called church strikes at the very heart of the our life in Jesus.
- See, Paul’s not writing to the churches in Crete telling them to be more organized because he’s an anal, OCD, order and control freak. That’s not the goal. The goal isn’t to be so ordered, so structured that we organize the Spirit right out of the life of the church. That’s as disastrous as chaos and disorder. Paul says what he says, he writes what he writes, he appeals to order in the church, in the home and in our work in the world because that’s who we are as the people of God. [Slide #2]

Big Idea

- **Our life in Jesus, our identity, our salvation, is the story of God moving us from chaos to order**
- The God who created the world, through a series of creative acts, imposes order on the cosmos. Darkness to light. The emptiness, the formlessness the void is brought to order. And God declared this order to be good.
- The same God who created the world does the same exact thing when a person becomes a Christian. **2 Corinthians 4:6** says *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the*

light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. New life in Jesus is like creation all over again. Sin is disorder and darkness and chaos. God rescues us from the dominion of darkness and the chaos and disorder of sin and brings us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.¹

- Think of the Gerasene demoniac. Before Jesus. Out of his mind. Chaotic. A raving lunatic. After an encounter with Jesus? Ordered. Organized. At peace at Jesus' feet.
- Our salvation is in every sense freedom from the disorder and chaos of sin. *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.* **2 Corinthians 3:17**. By the way, for believers that's the real 4th of July celebration. As the people of God we are freed from the power and effects and the devastation of sin. We are freed from sin so that we might live ordered, organized lives as God's servants. Even so, because of our sin nature, the natural tendency, even of the redeemed, is toward disorder, disorganization, chaos.
- Our living room floor, now matter how clean it is in the morning, is a chaotic mess by nightfall. Even though we're clean people. Constant intervention is required. It's the same with church. We're clean, redeemed people. But without constant intervention the natural tendency is toward disorder, disorganization, chaos. That's part of why God gifts his Spirit to the church. Without the intervention of the Spirit, the natural tendency of our life together in Jesus is chaos.
- So whenever, wherever Christians gather, if the Spirit is truly present, there will be this life-giving order, structure, organization; the fruit of the Spirit's work, the fruit of having been redeemed by Christ. Which is why you get statements in the New Testament like **1 Corinthians 14:33**. *For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.* Or the warnings against *disorder* from **2 Corinthian 12** and **James 3**. Or Paul's letter to Titus.
- It's interesting, in the Old Testament, chaos, lack of order, was a sign of God's judgment. Think of the Tower of Babel. God brings disorder, chaos, confusion. Against the nation of Edom **Isaiah 34:11** says *God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos.* And I think the same is true now. Disorder, chaos, lack of organization---all of which keep the Kingdom of God from growing, flourishing, all are evidence that something is not right.
- The key to undoing congregational patterns of disorder and disorganization is to do what Paul does in his letter to Titus. He doesn't just hit the ground running and tell them be ordered, be organized. He opens, he introduces his letter. **Titus 1:1-4**. Basically, what Paul does with this introduction is show Titus that the reason church and family should be ordered, organized is because

¹ Colossians 1:13

our life in Jesus, our identity, our salvation itself, is the story of God moving us from chaos to order.

Transition

Look at [verse 1-4](#).

- Listen. *Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness-- 2 a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, 3 and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior, 4 To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.*
- We take for granted how God has given order and structure and purpose to our lives through Jesus. We too quickly, too easily forget that life without Christ is a mess. Paul says God has given his elect, faith, knowledge and hope. He has ordered our lives, organized our lives by giving us faith, knowledge of the truth and hope. The order and organization that comes to our lives by these three things is the basis for being organized in the home and corporately as organized communities of Jesus.
- God has given believers the faith to lay hold of, the faith to grasp Christ. Do you know how stabilizing that is? So many people are grasping, groping for something worth holding onto and yet we say, *He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.*² This is yours, he is yours, Christ is yours. And this faith to grasp him has a grounding effect. It allows a person to have a purpose beyond themselves. By giving you faith to grasp and lay hold of Christ God has given you something your life didn't have pre-Christ.
- Jesus spoke of people having little or much faith. Paul thanked the Thessalonians that their faith was growing more and more. And the more God gives you the faith to grasp Christ and hold onto Christ grows the more the believer can say *I will never be shaken*. Man, what an awesome thing to have.
- Paul also says God has given believers *a knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness*. What's the opposite? A lie that leads to chaos, disorder, destruction. Without Christ, that's where people are at. That's where you were at before Christ. Believing a lie leading to chaos and disorder and eventually destruction.
- Well, how do we know what's true? The essential feature of truth, and a good test of its authenticity, is that since all things true come from God

² Psalm 62:2

something that is supposedly true should lead to God. If something is supposedly true and doesn't lead to God and promote godliness, it isn't true.³

- If you are a Christian believer God has ordered your life, organized your life by giving you a *knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness*. Do you realize, do you even remember how wonderful that is? You know what is true and right and pure and noble so that how you live doesn't lead toward chaos and disorder and destruction but instead toward Him and toward godliness.
- So *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*.⁴ There's more to know of Christ. There's always more to know of Christ. You never arrive. And the more you know of Christ and grow in this knowledge of Christ the less likely you are to believe the lies that lead to chaos, disorder, and destruction.
- Third, Paul says God has given believers the *hope of eternal life*. God has given the Christian believer a future inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.⁵ It's yours through Christ. Without Christ, apart from Christ there is no hope of eternal life. In Christ God has organized your life in such a way that you know where you are going. You have direction. You're not aimless and directionless.
- Do you see what Paul is doing here? Paul's not writing to these disorderly disorganized house churches commanding them to be ordered organized for the sake of order and organization. Because that's not his goal. Structure, order, organization those things don't produce life. In and of themselves, those things are dead.
- Rather, Paul tells the churches on Crete to be ordered and organized because those things are the byproducts of life with Jesus. Jesus begets life. Again, the God who created the world, who brought order and good things and light out of darkness and chaos does the same exact thing when a person becomes a Christian. **2 Corinthians 4:6**. *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," (Genesis 1:3) made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.* New life in Jesus is like creation all over again. God rescues us from the chaos and disorder of sin and creates ordered, organized, purposeful lives in Jesus name.
- The reason for the order, the reason for the organization is because the story of our salvation is the story of us moving from chaos to order. He has ordered our lives, organized our lives by giving us faith, knowledge of the truth and

³ Stott, *Guard the Truth*, p. 169.

⁴ 2 Peter 3:18

⁵ 1 Peter 1:4

hope. And so the story of our families and story of our church must follow suit; from chaos to order.

Conclusion

- [Video] When the world seems a defeat for God; when you find yourself sick of the disorder, the violence, the terror; when the chaos seems overwhelming, say to yourself, "Jesus died and rose again. He has the whole word in his hands. He is in control. He is the one who brings order out of chaos." And know that this same God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has called you, his church, to the awesome task of bringing order out of chaos.
- When you forgive your enemy, when you feed the hungry, when you defend the weak, and the fatherless, and the powerless, you confess Jesus is alive and move this world from chaos to order.
- Every Katrina trip, every service project, every trip to the inner city is a confession that Jesus is alive and moves this world from chaos to order.
- Every tear you shed, every financial sacrifice, every moment of time spent serving people in their pain and suffering and fear is a confession that Jesus is alive and a move from chaos to order.
- When you have the courage to marry, when you welcome the newborn child, when you adopt, when you build your home on Christ you confess that Jesus is alive and you move this world from chaos to order.
- Every departing missionary is an act of faith in the resurrection and a move from chaos to order.⁶ Every prayer, as [Karl Barth](#) put it, "is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world."
- May God use us, this disorganized, disorderly, rag-tag mess called Grace Community Church for his own purpose and glory.

⁶ Carlo Carretto in *Blessed Are You Who Believed*. Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 4.