

LOVE CAME DOWN

December 2, 2011

Discussion Guide

Grace came down—Titus 2.11-14

Getting Started: 10 minutes

o When was the first time you remember hearing the message of the gospel? What affect did it have on you?

Setting the Stage: *“The gospel is bigger than the cross.” That’s a pretty bold statement, one that certainly needs some backing up. It certainly is a statement that at the very least seems a bit out of place this time of year. Come on. It’s Christmas. Shouldn’t we be talking about angels, a babe in a manger, shepherds and the like? We certainly should, and with and through them we discover that the gospel is bigger than the cross. It is at Christmas that we discover that the gospel is in the manger. The gospel is in the birth. The gospel is in everything that surrounds the Christmas story for gospel is bigger than the cross. If the gospel is bigger than the cross, then could it be that the gospel has implications beyond the cross? What might it mean for you and for me for the gospel to be found in the manger and not just on the cross?*

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Titus 2.11-14.
- According to Paul, what is the message of the gospel? What are the implications of the gospel?
- Think about how you have heard people define the gospel. In what ways are these definitions like or unlike Paul’s? In your mind, what might be the significance of any differences?
- How have you typically defined the gospel? In what ways has your understanding of the gospel affected your life?
- React to Paul’s argument that the gospel is bigger than the cross and that it has both present and future dimensions. Could you expand on your reaction?
- In what ways, if any, might Paul’s explanation of the gospel affect you? Can you elaborate?
- In what ways might you consider opening your life so that the gospel could affect you in these ways?

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o Housekeeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

Group Notes

Grace came down—Titus 2.11-14

Context and Background

Titus (the person): Titus was a mission companion of Paul. He is not mentioned by Luke in Acts. However, Titus does appear in the letters of Paul. In these letters we find glimpses of Titus' ministry but little concerning the man himself. He first appears in Galatians as a companion of Paul on his visit to Jerusalem (Galatians 2.1-3). Here we discover that Titus was an uncircumcised Greek believer. How Titus came to faith is not mentioned, though one might assume he became a believer through the ministry of Paul. Paul next mentions Titus in his Corinthian correspondence (2 Corinthians 2.13, 7.6, 8.16-24). It seems that Titus was intimately involved in sorting out the issues within the Corinthian congregation. It may be that this experience in guiding a struggling congregation prepared Titus for an assignment in the church in Crete, a church that had its own struggles with faith and practice. He seems to be a man who had a pastor's heart and the ability to put struggling congregations back in order (Titus 1.5). Paul seems to have had great trust in Titus' ability and great love and concern for Titus as a person calling him his true son in the faith (Titus 1.4).

Titus (the letter): The letter of Titus is a letter from Paul to Titus who had been sent by Paul to sort out issues within the church on the island of Crete. The letter of Titus does not fit easily within the historical framework of Acts. It seems most likely that the events described took place after Paul's imprisonment in Rome. One might argue that Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment and that he visited Spain as planned (Romans 15.24, 28). During this time, Paul also may have visited Ephesus, Macedonia, and Crete (1 Timothy 1.3 and Titus 1.5). The trip to Crete seems to have been short thus necessitating Paul's sending of Titus to Crete to finish the work. The main issue in the Cretan church appears to be a disconnect between their faith and practice. That is, the Cretan Christians were living in ways that contradicted what they said they believed. According to Paul, right belief should lead to right practice (Titus 2.1). Paul encouraged Titus to instruct the Cretan believers in proper Christ-like behavior, and that this behavior actually had its roots in the message of the gospel (Titus 2.11-15). The letter to Titus is probably one of Paul's last letters, followed only by 2 Timothy, a letter written after Paul's re-arrest which led to his martyrdom.

Grace: Grace has often been defined in our modern context as God's unmerited favor demonstrated in God's decisive saving act in Jesus. While this understanding of grace can be drawn from Paul's letters, grace actually is used more broadly in the New Testament and by Paul to refer to God's effective power to do His will. In this sense, grace is central to all of God's redemptive activity and is experienced in an ongoing way by God's people rather than just in a moment.

The Text

Grace came down (Titus 2.11): Paul encouraged Titus to instruct the Cretan Christians in right behavior. In Titus 2.11-15, Paul notes that this right behavior is rooted in the message of the gospel. Here, Paul summarizes the gospel in a single sentence. The message of the gospel is that God's grace has appeared and offered salvation to all people. In this statement, Paul personifies the term "grace" and uses it to refer to Christ and his entire ministry. In this sense, Paul uses a single term to encapsulate the entire movement of God in Christ much like John does in John 1.14 with the term "Word." Paul's point seems to be to note that the entire ministry of Jesus, including his work on the cross, is part of God's work of offering salvation. The entire life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus is a ministry of grace.

Grace has a purpose (Titus 2.12-14): Paul moves quickly from his summary of the message of the gospel to its purpose. The gospel does offer salvation, but this salvation might be described as a new way of life in the present. The grace of God teaches people to refuse ungodliness and worldly passions and to live in an upright, self-controlled and godly manner. In this statement, Paul contrasts ungodliness with godliness. The basic contrast is between a life that is on God's terms and a life that is not on God's terms. Paul seems to be saying that the point of salvation is to move people to the life God desires and that this life has realities in the present and future. It is the present aspects of salvation that the Cretan Christians seem to be struggling with the most. Therefore, Paul reminds Titus that Christ came to redeem people but this includes the purification of people so that they become a people eager to do good work.

Application: The entire life and ministry of Christ is a single movement of grace. From beginning to end, God is moving to rescue all people. This rescue is as much about the present as it is the future. Certainly God's rescue has a future dimension that includes the experience of the glory of God. However, God's rescue also has a present dimension that leads to the experience of a new life in the present. This life is one in which a person begins to experience life on God's terms in an ever-increasing manner. In modern evangelical thought, much emphasis is often given to the future dimension of God's salvation to the exclusion of the present dimension. The result is that modern believers, much like the ancient Cretans, live out a disconnect between what they say they believe and how they live. To experience life in this way is to experience only a partial gospel.