

Titus 2.11-14

Christmas Time-Travellers

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If I asked to you name a Christmas time-traveller, what would you say? I think most people would probably say Doctor Who... But I have to confess, that even though I am an avid Doctor Who fan, the Christmas specials of recent years have been really quite disappointing.

But you don't need a TARDIS to be a time traveller; you simply need to be a Christian. You see, Christians live in the past, the present, and the future – all at once! Let me explain...

Appearing (Past)

Paul says, Christmas is all about gifts: **for the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people** (11). The short way of saying that is: Jesus is born! Jesus is God's gift to all people, free and undeserved, but truly and fully given. That's what grace is: something we don't deserve, but are given anyway. And that gift brings – or rather *offers* salvation to all people. We still have to receive it, with thankful hearts.

However, I think the most important word there is actually the word **'appeared'**. The Bible, the Christian faith, it isn't all made up. It's not a fairy-tale we tell ourselves to make ourselves feel better. The word **'appeared'** means 'unveiled', 'made known', 'revealed'. Our faith isn't speculation, a myth or a legend; it is the truth, told us, made known to us, revealed to us, unveiled by God himself in Jesus.

And you know the really *really* good thing about that? It has *already* happened. And so it can't be changed, any more than I can change what I had for breakfast this morning (sausages, fried eggs and pancakes, American style with maple syrup, by the way).

We can never change the fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, laid in a manger, announced by angels, visited by shepherds and Magi, hunted by Herod.

We can never change the fact, that in Jesus all the fullness of God came to live among us.

We can never change the fact that Jesus **gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness** (14) – and that is why all Christians live in the past.

Who Christians are, our identity as children of God, loved and cherished by him, is built on the solid rock of what *happened* when the **grace of God appeared**, in Jesus, 2,000 years ago.

Teaching (Present)

But Christians don't only live in the past. We aren't to sit here, smugly in the knowledge that we have the greatest gift of all in Jesus. That wouldn't do at all.

Just now I read the first part of verse 14: Jesus **gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness** – but it carries on – **and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.**

Jess and I got engaged in September, and we will be married in August next year. It is very exciting, and I am pretty sure we will be very happy together.

But what if, after we got married, we sat back and said, right, we've got married, we've had the engagement and the wedding, so that's it then? [*Pause, look confused.*] Of course, there is far more to a marriage than the wedding day. That is the solid rock, the thing that *has happened*, that cannot be changed.

What happens next, is that the couple have to *live out* their vows and promises to each other every day. That isn't something you do once, in church, standing before a vicar. It's something you have to do, every single day, *no matter what*.

And it's exactly the same with the Christian faith. In Jesus **the grace of God has appeared** (11). Jesus **gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness** (14).

But God's grace does something else as well (12):

It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

Titus 2.12 (NIV)

Jesus didn't **redeem us from all wickedness** so we could sit back and relax, like the couple who think a marriage is all about the wedding day. No!

Christians don't only live in the past: we also live in the present, as God's grace **teaches us** godliness. That should be the goal of every Christian's life. It's the way we should live out the gift of salvation, like a husband and wife living out their vows daily.

And that's quite hard. It's really difficult saying 'no' to **worldly passions**, which are ever so tempting. It's really difficult to be **self-controlled**, especially when surrounded by a culture that makes a god of the freedom to do whatever you want.

But we do have help: if godliness is the goal, then grace is the engine that helps us get there. We will still mess things up, but if we don't ask for God's help – if we don't use the gift he's given us to help us live the life he redeemed us to live – then we really *don't* have a hope.

So: Christians live in the past, and also in the present. But what about the future?

Waiting (Future)

Living a godly life in the present is not only a response to the past gift, it is also the way Christians *wait* for the great future God has in store for us. Paul uses the same word ‘appear’ for both (11 + 13): Jesus appeared once, and that is the guarantee that he will appear again.

Into this present age will dawn a new day; the bright light of Jesus the Son will shine; the truth will be unveiled for the whole world to see: he won’t appear as the ‘sweet little baby Jesus’ in a manger, but in **glory** as **our great God and Saviour** (13).

The world likes to hear about the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. A baby isn’t very dangerous, it doesn’t threaten anyone, it is weak and helpless. As a baby Jesus is easy to ignore.

But let me tell you this: as Judge, coming in **glory** – that is totally different. That is why Christians live in the future. We don’t forget the past, and we work hard to live a godly life in the present – but always looking to the future, as **we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ** (13).

Holy Communion

Did you know Christians are time-travellers? Did you know that in us, past present and future all meet?

And, did you know, that the food time travellers eat, is Holy Communion? In this special meal, past present and future all come together. It is more than a memory, it is the expression of our identity as Christians.

By breaking bread and pouring out wine, we remember Jesus' last supper with his friends, and the way he **gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness** (14).

By receiving the bread and wine with open hands, we thank God for the grace he has given us, and ask for God's help **to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives** (12).

By sharing Holy Communion with each other, in obedience to Jesus' command, and until he returns, we look forward eagerly **to the appearing in glory of our great God and Saviour** (13), and the wedding-banquet of the Lamb.

Past, present and future in one. And our goal? Our aim in this present life, today? Godliness. Godliness is the way we live *today*, in response to what Jesus has done for us *yesterday*, while we wait for his return *tomorrow*.

Let us pray

Father, thank you for the grace you have shown us in Jesus. May each one of us enjoy our time-travelling Christmas, and resolve to follow Jesus with thankful hearts, godly lives and eager expectation.

Amen.