

A Message for Christmas: Grace and Glory (Titus 2:11-12)

By Bob Young

In the hustle and bustle of Christmas and all the festivity of the season, the question could and should be raised, how did the first century Christians celebrate Christmas? Did they celebrate the birthday of their Lord Jesus Christ? To read carefully the NT is to make a rather startling discovery. There is no Christmas celebration in the NT! The story of Jesus' birth is told with visits from the shepherds and then the wise men. But in the writings of Paul and James and Peter and John there is no reference to a Christmas celebration. Did they not care about the birthday of Jesus? Were they opposed to it like the early Pilgrim Fathers, who felt it was a frivolous and worldly manifestation and forbade it by law?

Think with me. The early Christians did not see the life of Jesus in segments as we do—the birth, early ministry, journey to Jerusalem, cross, resurrection. We have the written Gospels and it is easier to study it when it is broken up that way. But the early Christians saw the life of Jesus and his ministry as one complete whole, all the great events blended together into one, "the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but take your share of suffering for the gospel in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. {2 Tim 1:8-10}

Titus speaks of Jesus' appearing, but in a different context with different meaning.

For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.... {Tit 2:11-14}

Grace and glory. The grace of God has appeared." That appearing covers the whole life and ministry of Jesus Christ, from birth to the cross and the resurrection; from the open heavens where the shepherds heard the voices of the angels singing, to the open heavens when the disciples looked up and saw him disappearing into the clouds of heaven. The appearing of Jesus Christ. The appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, "our blessed hope." We live in the middle. NEB, "The grace of God has dawned upon the world."

God reaching out to man. God Reaching Announcing Christ Everyone

God's agenda in Christ is love (John 3:16-17). In Jesus, grace appeared.

God's purpose of grace—salvation. The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men."

... training us to renounce worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world. {Tit 2:12}

GRACE

First, grace changes our loyalties and our lives. "renouncing irreligion (or godlessness) and worldly passions, and then, lawful life, "soberly, uprightly and godly" in this present world. Be not conformed to this world" (do not let the world around you squeeze you into its mold), "but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2).

Second, grace implies guidance, norms, standards. Paul describes it in three terms, "sober upright, and godly."

Third, grace is for our lives in this world.

...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. {Tit 2:14 RSV}

GLORY

The glory is yet to come, the glory has come. Glory to God in the highest. Jesus declared God's glory. Jesus came full of grace and truth, and we beheld his glory.

How is the glory present? A people for his own possession. The secret of a godly life is God himself—Jesus living in you, making the difference, imparting the power, preserving purity. He is the only answer.

The fulness of the glory is yet to be revealed.

End on practical note. Sermons can sound wonderful and paint beautiful pictures, but then what?

Changed lives – coming to Christ means a new commitment – living by grace with the glorious end in sight. Transformed heart and transformed life, an altered loyalty, an altered life. This is what Christmas means. The appearing—looking forward to the appearing!