

In the Country of the Blind

Family Talk, Part 8

Titus 2:15

English author H. G. Wells, famous for his culturally provocative novels like *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*, once wrote a lesser known short story called “The Country of the Blind”.

It’s a story about a luxurious, inaccessible valley in Ecuador where everyone was born blind. There was no sight or color or even news of an outside world. They had everything they wanted in this forgotten, hidden fertile valley – they had everything, but sight.

Finally a young man from the outside world was exploring that region and accidentally fell off a cliff and slid down, down into the deep foliage of this forest. He survived and stumbled into this forgotten country.

It wasn’t long before he encountered the people and when he realized every single person he met was blind – in fact, the entire population of this hidden culture – he gathered as many as would listen to him and began to talk to them of things around them and color and beauty of creation and he told them of another world out there beyond the valley.

They sat with him and listened, with their faces sad and downcast . . . but in the end they chose not to believe him. In fact, after many of them tired of his stories of what it was like to see.

Many came to the conclusion that his sight had caused him to lose his sanity. He was simply out of his right mind.

In spite of this, the young man decided to stay for a while and work among them. It wasn’t long before he fell in love with a girl there from a prominent

family and decided to marry her and settle down in this Country of the Blind.

The girl’s father went to a respected elder – and doctor – to talk about the proposal. They concluded it would never work unless something radical occurred.

The doctor said, “I think I may say with reasonable certainty that, in order to cure him of his insanity, we must remove his eyes.

The father asked, “Then he will be sane?”

“Oh yes, then he will be perfectly sane and a quite admirable citizen.”

The father goes back and reports to the young man that he can marry his daughter only if submitted to an operation that will blind him for life.

The man left to think it over and, Wells writes, he had fully meant to go to some lonely place where the meadows were beautiful with white flowers and there remain until the hour of his sacrifice, but as he walked he looked around him at the beauty of creation; he saw the sun rising in the morning and like an angel in golden armor, the sunlight shown into the valley.

He realized then and there that this valley was nothing more than a trap of ignorance and futility – and he escaped with his life from this Country of the Blind.¹

In a very real way, the Island of Crete was a country of the blind. It was enslaved to sin and enveloped in spiritual darkness – given over to drunkenness and immorality; it was a spiritually bankrupt culture.

And the answer – the game plan – would involve a living dynamic unified, gospel saturated, Christ exalting body of believers who understood their mission.

I find it fascinating that Paul’s solution to false teaching and false teachers on the island of Crete was not only sending Titus to these churches to put qualified shepherds into leadership, but to put the rest of the church family on special assignment.

The solution wouldn’t be sudden . . . it will take a lifetime . . . it will require daily influence as salt and light.

You see the difference between us and the young man in Wells novel is that we do not escape with our lives – we give our lives – we invest our lives into the darkness around us where we shine as light in this culture.

We are in the world of the blind but we are not of it.

We are here as ambassadors of the King of Light, with the message of light to a people the Apostle Paul described as *blinded by the god of this world and we pray that their eyes will be opened to the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4)*.

It won’t be easy . . . they think you’ve lost your mind. They think you’re making it up.

You’re living in a world is determined to silence any revelation of another world out there.

They are determined to remove any semblance of spiritual sight and light.

I read this week of only one more illustration of our countries fascination with removing anything of Christianity from sight. One U.S. District court judge proposed a solution to the case brought before him by the American Civil Liberties Union – a case bringing suit against a high School in southwest Virginia that had displayed the 10 commandments for the past decade on the wall of one of the buildings on the school grounds.

The judge ruled that the school could continue to display the 10 commandments only if they removed the four commandments that explicitly refer to God. He ordered the school into mediation to work out a compromise with the ACLU.ⁱⁱ

We don’t want anybody to see any reference to our Creator. Let’s surgically remove any sight of God and then you’ll all become good citizens in the country of the blind.

If there was ever a time for the church to recognize the blindness of her world – if there was

ever a time for the church to display the glorious light of the gospel, it is now.

Where do go from here? What’s our game plan?

Paul provides the answer in his letter to Titus.

He began a serious, pointed family talk in *chapter 2 and verse 1* where he said, ***“But you, Titus . . . but as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.”***

In other words, tell people the truth.

And start with the church.

You’ll notice the chapter ends in the same way – look down at *verse 15*. ***These things speak*** – same word – ***and exhort and reprove with all authority***.

The chapter begins and ends with the same command.

Only in *verse 15* Paul will expand on the idea with 3 imperatives – you could write an exclamation point into your Bibles after each verb – speak (exclamation point); exhort (exclamation point) and reprove (exclamation point).

You get the picture that these are not suggestions or options.

In fact, these initiatives form the job description of every obedient pastor/elder/teacher/church leader.

They actually form the game plan for the church at large.

Let’s take a closer look at this plan for the church on the Island of Crete and in any country for that matter.

1. Conversation

We’ll call the first initiative conversation.

Paul writes in *verse 15*, ***“these things speak”***. He uses the word *laleo* (λαλεω) which can be translated, “to announce or reveal or disclose something; it can be used for careful teaching.ⁱⁱⁱ

But it can also simply refer to ordinary conversation.

He’s not just talking about sermon manuscripts and apologetic discourses and theological dissertations.

He’s talking about conversation that takes place in the lunchroom; over the back yard fence; in the hallways at work, with friends on the deck in the backyard and with children as you sit on the edge of their bed before you tuck them in at night.

Paul is saying, “I know it sounds simplistic and not all that strategic – but this is the game plan – talk about Jesus Christ. Bring Him into your

conversations . . . let Him be the subject of your discussion on the golf course or at the restaurant or on an airplane.”

And by the way, it’s a wonderful way to meet other Christians you didn’t know were Christians – and you get those moments of surprising fellowship.

My wife and I met believing sky caps who helped us with our baggage both coming and going this past week as we traveled to South America. In both cases we were prepared to drop the seed of the gospel but they both responded with that “I already know what you’re talking about” kind of response and in both cases we ended up enjoying fellowship of two brothers who we didn’t know were part of the family.

The only problem with that is you’ve gotta tip ‘em and now they know who you are. My wife gave me that look of love and affection that says, “Get out your wallet.”

This verb refers to the ordinary conversations of life.

And more specifically, Paul writes, “***These things speak.***”

What are these things? Paul is referring to speaking the things, he wrote in verse 1 that fit hand in glove with sound doctrine.

Paul is effectively saying, “Speak about the things I brought up in the previous 14 verses.”

Talk about:

- what it means to be a dignified older man;
- an older woman committed to sobriety;
- the role of a mother;
- the maturing responsibility of a young man;
- the ethics of being an honest employee;
- becoming a man or woman of your word . . . talk about this stuff!

And not just in here.

Take it out there . . . shed some light on for the sake of your world which is wandering around in the dark . . . talk about this with the citizens in the Country of the Blind.

Dear flock, the subjects of Christianity are not to be reserved for Sunday.

Make it a part of your daily conversation.

2. Motivation

Secondly, not only are we to be involved in conversation, but motivation.

Look at the second initiative . . . Paul writes in **verse 15, *These things speak (exclamation point), now notice, and exhort (exclamation point).***

Now this verb is a little more intense.

It’s a favorite word of the Apostle’s Paul’s and it’s from compound verb, parakaleo (παρακαλεω) which means to call to one’s side.

Paul uses the word 9 times with Timothy and Titus and 64 more times in his other letters.^{iv}

Depending on the context, you can translate it with the nuance of encouraging, or counseling or commending or even admonishing.

Again, it’s a stronger word than talking or speaking.

This word involves more than simply stating and explaining truth, it carries the idea of entreating, or pleading.^v

It carries the emotion of someone trying to persuade or convince or invite someone to come along.

It’s not just conversation, it’s an invitation! And you really need to do something about it!

It’s the difference between casually informing someone there’s a forest fire in California and telling them the back of their shirt is on fire.

This is really important, right now . . . to you!

Beloved, you are in the country of the blind and you’re passionate that they understand there are things they must see . . . there’s another world out there!

There are elements in chapter 2 to not only talk about but do something about.

The grace of God has appeared, bringing the offer of salvation to all men – join us, please – as we look for the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Listen Titus will preach we need to exhort one another to be zealous for good deeds.

And there’s a difference between being available for good deeds, and zealous for good deeds.^{vi} Being available creates a list of good intentions and resolutions; zeal begins to check them off one at a time.

Conversation needs to resolve in motivation.

As I thought about the distinctions between conversation and motivation, it occurred to me that you can talk about something without ever becoming personally involved.

But you cannot motivate someone – you cannot plead with or commend or counsel or encourage

someone without personally becoming involved in someone's life.

Like Abraham Lincoln who, in 1850, received a letter from his step-brother, John Johnston who wrote to Lincoln and asked him, yet again, for money so he could settle his debts.

On numerous occasions in the past, Lincoln simply gave him the money so he wouldn't have to get too involved, and that was the end of it, until the usual request arrived yet again.

This time, Lincoln decided to get involved more personally in an effort to motivate his brother to stay out of debt.

He wrote this letter, which has survived.

Dear Johnston,

Your request for 80 dollars I do not think it best to comply with now. At the various times when I have helped you a little you have said, to me that you can get along very well now. But, in a very short time I find you in the same difficulty again. Now, this can only happen by some defect in your conduct. What that defect is, I think I know. You are not lazy, but you are an idler. (that is, you're in neutral). Since I saw you, I doubt whether you have done a good whole day's work . . . this habit of wasting time is the difficulty; it is vastly important to you, and still more so to your children, that you should break this habit. You are now in need of some money; and what I propose is, that you shall go to work for somebody who will pay you for it . . . and I now promise you, that for every dollar you will earn, between this and the first of May, I will then give you one other dollar. Now, if you will do this, you will be soon out of debt, and, what is better, you will have a habit that will keep you from getting in debt again.

*Affectionately your brother,
Abe Lincoln^{vii}*

3. Alteration

There's a third initiative . . . the game plan for the church is not only involvement in conversation, and motivation, but alteration.

The word, Paul uses here is a word (ελεγγε) which means to correct or even, to convict.^{viii}

Again, these verbs become progressively more intense and strong.^{ix}

There's not only conversation and motivation, but alteration.

And it begins with us!

The truth of "*these things*" – things delivered in chapter 2 eventually cut a path to our hearts and demand nothing less than radical change.

It might help to think of the church as a tailor's shop you go to with your dress or your pair of pants. You're going there because you need something altered – something doesn't fit – something isn't right – and it needs to be changed.

The truth is, you wouldn't go back to a tailor if they didn't alter what you brought in . . . that why you went.

Can you imagine your tailor saying, "Listen, I didn't want to offend you by suggesting that anything you owned needed changing, so all I did was iron it . . . it looks so much better."

Ladies and Gentlemen, we haven't come here to look better . . . we've come here to be altered.

That's what genuine worship performs in our lives.

One Puritan defined good worship as that which enlivens our conscience by the holiness of God; feeds our minds with the truth of God; purges our imagination by the beauty of God; opens our heart to the love of God and causes us to devote our will to the purpose of God.^x

Hey, how was worship this morning? Oh, man, we didn't sing any of my favorites . . . I didn't see any of my friends . . . and the message was too short . . . ahem.

Oh . . . but was your imagination purged? Was your conscience enlivened . . . did you have an encounter through the word and through song and through prayer with the love and beauty and holiness of God?

They would probably wonder, "Just what kind of church do you go to?!"

Our worship of God should be like a Tailor – which works in us insofar as we allow it to make alterations.

Titus, this is your job description first and foremost as the pastor/teacher on the island of Crete.

And it broadens to include the entire church in her mission.

We have been given the command to tell the life-altering – heart-changing truth to our Country of the Blind.

And the truth is not always polite conversation or even passionate motivation. Sometimes the truth

creates a collision – where your life and your message becomes a direct confrontation to your generation.

Martin Luther the reformer commented on this command in Titus chapter 2 when he wrote in the 16th century – and times haven't really changed all that much; he wrote, "I find it impossible to avoid offending guilty men, for there is no way of avoiding it but by our silence or their patience; and silent we cannot be because of God's command, and patient they cannot be because of their guilt."^{xi}

Keep in mind that Paul adds the phrase in *verse 15 – These things speak and exhort and reprove – notice – with all authority*.

Now you've done it . . . you've gone too far.

You can talk to me about Christianity and you might even encourage me to change and maybe get on to me about something – but don't tell me you have any kind of authority over me.

Authority is a dirty word in our culture today – authority stands in our way – it stops us from doing what we want to do – it interrupts our personal freedom.^{xii}

Pastors today refuse to deliver the truth of sin or judgment for fear of losing their influence or their popularity.

Parents today have become guilted into thinking that if they act with any authority they will lose the love of their children.

Authority is a bad word. And you can be embarrassed today as a parent or a teacher or a young person or a leader to represent yourself in such a way.

To dare to suggest – that's right . . . that's wrong . . . that's godly . . . that's sinful.

Listen, the Country of the Blind is much more comfortable with opinions than with ultimatums.

And here's what the enemy wants to silence – your authoritative message from God where you tell your world, "This is the way to heaven; that is the way to hell."

We are delivering the authoritative words of God.

William Barclay wrote in the last century, "The eyes of the sinner must be opened to his sin; the mind of the misguided must be led to realize its mistake; the heart of the heedless must be stabbed awake. The Christian message is not opium to send men to sleep; it is [a] blinding light which shows them as they are and God as he is."^{xiii}

You're in the land of the spiritually blind – tell them of the light of the glorious gospel which will give them everlasting sight.

Here's the good news - when you speak *these things* – when you dare to say, "the Bible says" . . . "the word of God says" – Paul says you have the backing of heaven.

So speak, exhort and reprove or correct.

Are there things that need correcting?

How about,

- Life began by chance
- The universe began by chance
- Human beings are animals
- A fetus isn't a baby
- Sex outside of marriage can be safe
- Whatever is legal is right
- Pornography is for the mature adult
- Divorce doesn't harm children
- Religions are all the same
- There are plenty of ways to God.

How's that for starters.

Paul identified Jesus in *verse 13* of this chapter with one of the strongest statements of hope regarding our future; a statement that is under attack all over again. Paul writes, ***Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.***

In the country of the Blind, everyone believes that Jesus is simply one among many ways to heaven.

He's one of any number of saviors; so long as you're sincere.

And there are plenty of pseudo-pastors and pseudo-spiritual leaders preaching that message of universalism today.

You can watch them on television today or pick up a bestselling book by them in the Christian bookstore.

Just this week I received a Christian journal that pointed out, with some courage, the disguise of universalism in the writings of Brian McLaren, called by the National Public Radio as one of the country's most influential evangelicals – which is a tragic revelation of the state of evangelicals.

In his book entitled *A New Christianity*, McLaren rejects the claim that the Bible provides certainty. He presses that one of the troubling things about Christianity is its dogmatism . . . its certainty."

Another author agrees and writes that we need to do is keep the big questions alive because that's really more important than answering them.

Do you want the question of your eternal destiny left open? Can you in fact be certain?

John the Apostle answered 2,000 years ago, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” (1 John 5:13)

That you may *know* . . . sounds rather certain, doesn’t he?

Another former evangelical pastor, Rob Bell, who since retired and moved to work on movies, pastored an evangelical church of thousands of people before publishing his book and then soon after retiring. His book simply repackages the heresy of universalism with a clever twist by saying that every sincere person is going to heaven by way of Jesus even though they didn’t actually believe in Him. He scoffed at the view of salvation that declared someone could actually be sent to hell. He writes, “As long as your heart is fine or your actions measure up, you’ll be ok.”^{xiv}

That’s like telling a cancer patient, “As long as you wear nice clothes, and shine your shoes you’re going to be just fine.”

Titus, Paul writes, this isn’t an option . . . deliver the truth to a country where no one can see.

I will involve conversation, motivation and alteration.

And don’t expect rose petals in response.

Having aired now for several years our sermons, I have received all sorts of responses –

- some have demanded that I make apologies on the air for what I’ve taught;
- some try change our doctrine;
- others claim their doctrine and their church and their beliefs are maligned.
- others send me books to read to change my mind . . .
- others have written to tell me to take a hike, only in more colorful language.

Perhaps that’s why Paul concludes by telling Titus and everyone else who teaches the truth of God’s word, here at the end of *verse 15, Let no one disregard you.*

You could render this, don’t let anybody write you off. Keep telling the truth regardless.

The word here for *disregard* only appears here in all of the New Testament. It’s a compound word that literally translated means to think around something.^{xv}

He’s saying, Titus, don’t let anyone run circles around you – don’t let anyone get loose on a loophole; make sure your teaching is clear and biblically defensible.

In fact, Paul uses the second person singular pronoun “*You*” which lays emphasis on the shoulders of Titus. *You*, Titus, make sure that you don’t let anyone get around you and deceive the flock or perhaps even turn your own mind around.

So here’s the game plan . . . here’s the way to daily impact the lives of people living on the Island of Crete and in Cary or Raleigh or Dunn or Apex or Chapel Hill or Holly Springs or wherever you happen to live and work and play.

Here it is:

- make Jesus Christ a part of your daily conversation
- make Christianity your motivating challenge to others
- make the truth of scripture the basis for your alteration, both personally and then through you as a living challenge and confrontation to the those around you.

And I want you to be encouraged today . . . Paul writes these three initiatives in the present tense. In other words, “Don’t stop . . . keep on doing it.”^{xvi}

Keep on conversing about it . . . keep on pleading that others believe it . . . keep on encouraging others to follow it . . . keep on inviting others to join you in it . . . keep on living it out . . . keep on holding to it . . . keep on . . . keep on . . . keep on!

Stay the course!

Don’t ever forget, we really are in the Country of the Blind – but we’re heading for a country of everlasting sight and glory and fellowship and light and beauty and perfection and endless worship.

I’m certain of it . . . I’m sure of it . . . I know it’s true . . . because the word of God has spoken.

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- i Adapted and edited from <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2008/october/2100608.html>
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- iii John MacArthur, Titus (Moody Press, 1996), p. 132
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- vii Richard Lawrence Miller, Lincoln and His World: Volume 3 (McFarland, 2011), p. 219
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- xiii William Barclay, The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 258
- xiv Above quotes from Charles McCracken, "The Push to Reinvent Christianity" (Israel My Glory, July/August 2012), p. 14
- xv John Philips, Exploring Titus (Kregel, 2004), p. 291
- xvi James Burton Coffman, Coffman Commentary Series: 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon (ACU Press, 1986), p. 322