October 25, 2026 *Marion* Weekly Update

Sermon "If You Believe It, You're Right" Proverbs 18:21-21, Exodus 4:8-17

Have you heard of the Pygmalion Effect? This is something that really looks at nature vs. nurture. Is our outcome defined by our genes or by our environment? Their has been a play and movie done with this as the basis. The idea is actually based in scientific research.

The theory is that people will meet the expectations placed on them and grow to believe and expect them themselves. If someone is taught they are bad and that is reinforced, then they are usually right. They will typically behave to those expectations. Similarly if someone is taught they are good and this is reinforced then they are usually right. They will behave to those expectations.

The shorthand term is self-fulfilling prophecy. If you believe it, you're right.

Think about a football team in the locker room before a game. If they are trash talking themselves. If they are degrading their own abilities. The team they are up against is better by every standard and all the talk is about how they are bound to lose. Downer downer downer. What does the coach do? A good coach will tell them to knock it off. That coach will encourage a positive way of talking and thinking.

Because the coach knows that if they team talks about all the work they have put in. If they pump one another and themselves up. If they remind each other that any given day any team can win, even if the odds are stacked against them. If they believe they have a shot...then they do.

It's no guarantee, but it ups the chances greatly.

This is related well to this Proverb.

Some look at this as some kind of cosmic magic mojo. We can literally speak actual death into a life. We can literally bring life back to someone or something. You hear people say things like "be careful, you're going to speak it into existence."

Some years ago a new agey book called "The Secret" hatched on this same idea from a less faith centered perspective. They call it the Law of Attraction. The idea is that if you want something enough, speak to it enough, eventually you will attract it. The universe will bring it to you. A key word to this is "manifest". You can "manifest" your desires.

All of this hinges on the idea that we as limited creations can bend the universe to our will. We get to call the shots. In essence we can corral God to do our bidding. None of this is true. Reality is what it is.

Yet there is truth to the Proverb and the idea that if you believe it, you're right. Particularly in the course of a life or path of a relationship or cause.

The term "believe" here though needs defined. It's not just a term of opinion. It's not about acknowledging something to be true. Believe is an act of commitment. To believe is to arrange the words and actions of a life to whatever that belief it.

For example, if I say I believe that Jesus is Lord of my life, that carries a lot of weight if it's true. It means that I study Him, I want to be like Him, I trust His words and teaching, I bend my own life to His example. That's belief. If I don't, then I don't believe.

I might admire. I might like. I might think He's got some cool stuff going on. But that isn't belief if my life doesn't reflect Him.

The "power of the tongue is about words being simple representation of heartfelt belief that we turn into intentional action towards the end of that belief. And that belief can be good or bad, right or wrong. Our actions and words can being those things to bear in the world.

This is particularly important if we consider a recent study/projection for the church in America over the next ten years.

The projection is that 100,000 churches will occur in that time period. If you crunch those number that is 27 churches a day closing up shop. That should be concerning to every person of faith.

They have found that most churches are about our size. Maybe a little bigger or smaller, but most churches in America are right where we are. One of the biggest keys to whether they will survive and thrive or be doom and gloom has to do with the congregations.

People see bigger church models with lots of staff and money to hire people to do the work of ministry. The congregant becomes the consumer expecting the church to serve them. That works when you have the numbers and the money.

It also cheats the members out of one of the most significant cornerstones of faith. Service. True belief results in a desire to step into the ministry of the church to fulfill our individual places in the body of Christ. You've heard me say often that real faith isn't passive. It is active.

What will determine the fate of most churches is whether they expect to have ministry done for them or if they are willing to put in the effort and sacrifice to actively do ministry themselves. Do they fill in where there is a need? Do they actively seek to bring others to faith and into the community of faith? This will be one of the main determining factors.

And here is where the "believe it and be right" piece comes in.

Waiting for someone else to step up often breeds many situations. It is problem focused rather than solution focused. It's complaining and grousing over the smallest things. It's drawing others into negativity through comments and conversation. As it looks about it assumes "well, I guess we're going to be one of those closing churches". If that belief spreads through the church enough, guess what. They are right.

Not because it's accurate. Simply because it discourages effort and makes the assumption a reality.

On the other hand.

Hear that prediction and flip the switch. Suddenly the petty things pass by so that the effort is in the solution not grousing about the problem. The conversation is about strengths of the church and how we can all pitch in to offer them out to those who aren't part of a community of faith. It's encouraging others and making calls to talk about how we can pull together and asking folks what they are willing to participate in to minister. And the response is a desire to jump in! The attitude is "we have too much to offer this world through our witness and faith.

We will NOT be one of those churches!" Those churches are far more likely to survive and thrive.

In some part it's because we have what you might call an "X Factor". That factor is that we aren't in this alone. We have One we can lean on in times of despair. When we are doubtful or tired we can look to God and find inspiration and motivation. When we don't feel like it we believe, truly believe, that what we are doing matters. It makes a difference here and eternally. In those moments of reflection, prayer, and faith we can find what we need to keep moving forward.

This was Moses. Here at the burning bush he's trying to squirrel out of God's request for him. Every excuse God gives him a solution. "Who do I say sent me?" God gives an answer. "What if they don't believe?" God gives him signs. Here at the end of the conversation God is getting irritated. "But I can't speak so good. I guess you'll have to find someone else!" So God gives him his brother Aaron to do the talking.

Paul says in Corinthians that God's strength is revealed in his own weakness. So he'll embrace his weakness so God can be more fully known.

This is where a bapticostal preacher might start saying things like: "When the world tells you not to even get started you say 'I know the one who said it's finished!'" or "If you hear 'you're not good enough' you say back 'maybe not! But greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world!'" or "God isn't with you in this" you say "My Lord said He will never leave nor forsake me but is with me to the ends of the earth!" Can I get an Amen!?

And as corny as all of that might sound, there's truth to it.

If we believe it, we're usually right. That said, we can believe bigger and dig deeper because the faith of a true Christian believes beyond ourselves. It's not just our own steam. Not just our own wisdom. Not just our own plans.

We believe in a God that has sent the Holy Spirit to inspire, direct, empower, comfort, and sustain us. We are not in this alone.

What do you believe? What do we believe? Is it only in ourselves or do we dare to believe in a God beyond us yet within us? Do we only believe in what serves our own interests or do we dare to believe in a life that is fully given to the purposes of God? Does my belief make the biggest difference for me or do I believe big enough to make a difference for untold others God has called me to serve and bless?

So often the words of Proverbs are accurate. What do we believe? Truly believe? Chance are we're right.

BIBLE STUDY Titus 2

As with last week, I encourage you to take a look at the write up in our Bible Study Library in the gathering area for more information about this chapter/letter/book. We're going to focus on some things that were highlighted in our discussion this week.

Naturally Titus is continuing to be instructed and encouraged in his ministry. That he's told to teach "sound doctrine" is telling. It means that the church now has an agreed upon doctrine that should be standard preaching for communities of faith. Titus's office and that there are

offices of leadership at all tells us that the church is formed with a structure. This is not the earliest parts of the church. It is well underway at this point.
Character traits are highlighted and then the chapter delves into roles. Roles for men, for women, and for slaves. It's noteworthy that there aren't any instructions here for slave masters. Only slaves. Crete likely didn't have much in the way of believing masters at this point. Nevertheless, the actions of others don't determine or define our own. We behave as Christians no matter what. That is part of a witness that has integrity and is uncompromising. The hope is that a Christ like witness to an unChristlike person can be inspiring and even converting.
As we looked at the scripture, something becomes apparent. We know that slavery is wrong. We disagree with it as a faith, and as a society. Yet throughout scripture, Old and New Testaments, slavery is a given. It is a natural part of life. No word is spoken against it. So if Biblically slavery is "fine", why do we have permission to rail against it? Hold on, because here we go!
The roles of women here are also not congruent with women in our modern day. This passage very much paints a "barefoot and pregnant" idea of what a woman is supposed to be. There is "submission", and caring for the kids and home. That's the extent of the woman's role and value.
Today there are still Christians who try to force feed women into this role. They are told what they can and can't be. They are told to take the direction of the man and dare not exert themselves. That women can and often are smarter and more capable than men is disregarded. That women are often more devout and faithful than men is ignored. They are a step down from men in the pecking order in the home and in the church.
Passages like this are hammered home to enforce this sentiment.
Why do some balk at this? Why do we give permission for women to be equal to men and exert leadership? Why do we rail against slavery?
Part of the key is in the last part of the verses about women. Women are to abide that station so that "the word of God is not discredited/blasphemed." This often "throwaway" statement is to me incredibly important.
Here are some significant factors. At this point the church still believe that Jesus was coming back very soon. If not immediately then in the foreseeable future. In other words, whatever station someone occupied it wasn't going to be for much longer. This includes the slave, the woman, and also the man.
The roles here are defined not by God but by the culture. The mission of the Christian was simple. Spread the gospel and draw as many into the community of faith as possible. That is the priority. That is the sacrifice. That is the calling of every person of faith.
What happens if the slave bucks the master? What happens if the woman steps out of her Roman appropriated role in defiance? What happens if other slaves or women follow? It disrupts the community. It paints a target on the Christian's back. It "discredits the word of God" in the eyes of the nonbeliever.
So what to do? Fit in. Don't borrow unnecessary trouble or pick fights that aren't as significant. After all, Jesus is coming soon so it's only a little while longer. Keep things level so

that the gospel can be heard on its own terms and merits. Draw as many in as possible. If that means sacrifice so be it.

There wasn't any concept that the world would still be spinning 2000 years later. There wasn't even a concept that the world spun!!! It was a means to the end of promoting the gospel.

Here we are... What have we figured out? We've figured out that slavery is wrong. So we have tried to right that wrong. We've figured out the capacity, intelligence, contribution, and equal value of women to men. We know this. Smart folks have shifted to let women step up and lead where they are called, able, and qualified. They give them equal voice and consideration. They put aside prejudice against those who are different, recognizing that we all have potential, worth, and contribution.

Culture is different. And that's not bad. In fact it's unavoidable. Look at history.

The question now is whether or not we are willing to apply this same priority to furthering the gospel. The truth of the gospel doesn't depend on gender roles. It doesn't depend on division or status divisions. It depends on the life of Jesus and Jesus alone.

So think about the messaging of some churches. Telling women that their main or only value is in having children. That they are consigned to being a homemaker. That they need to tamp down their gifts and energy to let less qualified men rule the roost. This isn't furthering the gospel. It literally drives people well away from it. Why? Because we are imposing 2000 year old cultural norms in 2026 America. They don't fit. Yet the gospel is timeless.

Telling men that they need to dominate the home. Claim their authority. Don't suffer a woman to step up. All that does is stoke the tyrant in many men. Which makes them behave very much unlike Jesus. It works against the gospel, not for it.

Mixing up cultural sensibilities with the purity of the gospel is damaging and dangerous It warps the gospel. It ascribes divine affirmation to things that are man made not God directed. And it puts us in the driver's seat instead of Christ.

The question is how do we embrace our present society AND put a gospel of redemption into that society in a compelling way?

Looking at this as eternally directed "rules and roles" misses the bigger point. It's going along with society so long as it doesn't violate the gospel for the purpose of preaching the gospel and bringing people to faith.

The last piece of the chapter is fantastic. It says "let no one despise you". I love where the discussion went immediately.

This isn't about demanding respect. It's not about forcing people into compliance. Titus is being through this chapter called to live and exemplary life. The point is that he, and all of us, should be living a life where no one has a reason to come against him. He should be living a life that is beyond reproach.

Letting no one despise us isn't a demand on the other. It is a responsibility from ourselves to God. We live faith in such a way that anyone speaking against us should be "brought to shame". Why? Because anyone who know us knows that the words against us don't hold water in light of a good, gracious, and Christ-centered life.