

“Living For Christ In A Confused and Confusing World”

A Study of Paul’s Letters to Timothy

Sermon #2

“Gratitude For Grace”

1 Timothy 1:12-17

As the Apostle Paul writes to his dear son in the faith, Timothy, who he has charged to lead the church at Ephesus, he knew that he had asked a lot of Timothy. As we noted in the last lesson Timothy may have had a predisposition due to his temperament to discouragement and depression. Therefore Paul writes to encourage this young preacher to continue to serve the LORD faithfully. In an effort to accomplish his goal of encouraging Timothy Paul uses his own life as an example of what Jesus can do through His grace and His power. Paul did not share his personal testimony in order to show how bad he had once been but rather how good God is! He says to Timothy, *“Look at my life Timothy! Look what Jesus has done for me!”*

Many people today seem to think that they deserve to be loved and forgiven by God. Paul was under no such delusion, in fact, Paul never got over being amazed that God could and did redeem someone like him. I want to examine with you three reasons given by Paul why God’s Grace is so amazing.

First, God’s Grace Is Amazing Because of How It Has Strengthened Him (v. 12)

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.”

Paul pointed out to Timothy how God had strengthened him. Sometimes the strengthening was physical. Sometimes the divine strengthening was mental. Sometimes the supply imparted was emotional (2 Cor. 7:6). Imagine how encouraging the knowledge of how God had strengthened Paul would have been to Timothy. Timothy could know that he did not have to do this task alone – the LORD was with him.

God’s Grace Is Amazing Because of How It Has Strengthened Him and...

Secondly, God’s Grace Is Amazing Because of What He was Called To Do. (v. 12)

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry”

Paul says that he labored with the realization that he had been divinely appointed by God to the ministry, although he did not deserve it. Although there can be little doubt that Paul

is describing his own call into the ministry we should not lose sight of the fact that the word translated “ministry” (*diakonian*) is the word we get deacon from. What is being described is a general call of the saved to serve God whether it is as a preacher in Paul’s case or some other capacity.

God’s Grace Is Amazing Because of What He was Called To Do and..

Third, God’s Grace Is Amazing Because of what Paul Had Been (v. 13)

“although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.”

Now if there ever was a man you would think would be the least likely to be saved it would have been Saul of Tarsus. In Acts 26:9-11 we read, “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. (10) This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. (11) And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”

Paul tells the story of his experience with Christ in Acts 9:3-6, “As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. (4) Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (5) And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” (6) So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

While Paul was on his way to the city of Damascus to hunt down more Christians, suddenly Christ himself appeared to Paul. Paul was knocked from his horse and struck blind, and at that time he heard those unforgettable words from Jesus, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Paul life was never the same, as he came to trust Jesus as his own personal Savior that day and he received his call to become an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Although we may not have had a Damascus road experience, if you are a Christian, somewhere along the line you have experienced the quiet insistence of the Holy Spirit calling you and saying, “*I want you!*”

When Paul says that he acted in (v. 13) “ignorance and unbelief” he is not saying this is an excuse for his actions, nor is he saying that earned him God’s mercy. But rather he is saying that because he acted in “ignorance and unbelief” he was not disqualified from receiving mercy.

Paul says that he had “obtained mercy” (v. 13) that phrase in the original Greek is in the *passive voice* and implies that Paul did not seek mercy but that mercy found him.

Vicki has recently sung a song which says in part, *“Beautiful, that’s how mercy saw me. Though I was broken and so lost, Mercy looked past all my faults. Justice of God saw what I had done, but mercy saw me through the Son. Not what I was, but what I could be. That’s how mercy saw me!”*

In verse fourteen Paul says, “And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”

Paul adds the Greek prefix *“huper”* to the word translated “abundant” to add extra intensity. Our word “hyper” as in hyperactive, comes from this source.

“Christ Came Into the World To Save Sinners.” (v. 15)

Verse fifteen of 1 Timothy chapter 1 has been called the gospel in miniature. “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”

As Paul had pointed out in the previous verses some may teach false doctrines, myths and endless genealogies (vv. 3-4). Others may have wondered away and turned to meaningless talk (v. 6). But this is something utterly different, words that are absolutely trustworthy. He not only says that this principle is trustworthy but that it is worthy of “all acceptance” that is that it should be universally accepted by all of mankind.

This is the first of five “faithful sayings” which occur in Paul’s letters (the others are 3:1, 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11, Titus 3:8). These sayings are the equivalent of when Jesus saying in the Gospels *“Truly, truly or Verily, verily.”* When Jesus used those words he was saying, *“Pay attention this is important!”* That is what Paul is doing here! Each time Paul uses the words “this is a faithful saying” he is underlining a fundamental principle. The principle here is *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!”*

The essence of the good news is about Jesus Christ. It is not about experience, it not anything you have to do. He did not come to help us save ourselves, He came to save us.

After quoting the principle that *“Jesus came into the world to save sinners”* Paul adds the words, “of whom I am chief.” Paul viewed himself as the worst of sinners or as we see it here the “chief” of sinners. As John Stott writes Paul, “had not investigated the sinful and criminal records of all the inhabitants of the world, carefully compared himself with them and concluded that he was worse than them all... Paul was so vividly aware of his own sins that he could not conceive that anybody could be worse.” [John Stott. *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus.* (Downer’s Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1996) p. 53]

Paul was saying that if he could save him then He can save anyone. It is as if he is saying, *"The worst sinner of all has been saved, so don't use that as an excuse!"* In fact Paul was so notorious and his conversion so dramatic and unbelievable that the Jerusalem church thought it was some kind of trick. In Acts 9:26 we read, "And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple."

It is also worthy of noting that in verse fifteen that Paul did not say, *"I was the worst of sinners, but I am the worst!"* This is healthy thinking for a truly saved person. Being saved should never engender in a Christian a sense of superiority. Paul knew what he had been and what he was and what in himself he continued to be.

"For This Reason" (v. 16)

In verse sixteen Paul tells us, "However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all long-suffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life."

Paul says the "reason" that God showed mercy to him was not simply to save him from Hell so that he could go to heaven. Nor did he save him so that he could preach the gospel or write the epistles. God's purpose was to display his grace, power and his long suffering or patience.

Jesus the divine King is now characterized by four depictions in verse seventeen, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

1. He is eternal - "king eternal" or "king of the ages"

2. He is immortal.

3. He is invisible.

4. He is the only God (*mono theos*) What Paul is affirming here is not God's wisdom but God's person. Isaiah 45:18 declares, "For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the LORD, and there is no other."

I want to close by telling the wonderful illustration of grace that Max Lucado tells in his book "No Wonder They Call Him Savior."

"Longing to leave her poor Brazilian neighborhood, Christina wanted to see the world. Discontent with a home having only a pallet on the floor, a washbasin, and a wood-burning stove, she dreamed of a better life in the city. One morning she slipped away, breaking her

mother's heart. Knowing what life on the streets would be like for her young, attractive daughter, Maria hurriedly packed to go find her. On her way to the bus stop she entered a drugstore to get one last thing. Pictures. She sat in the photograph booth, closed the curtain, and spent all she could on pictures of herself. With her purse full of small black-and-white photos, she boarded the next bus to Rio de Janeiro.

Maria knew Christina had no way of earning money. She also knew that her daughter was too stubborn to give up. When pride meets hunger, a human will do things that were before unthinkable. Knowing this, Maria began her search. Bars, hotels, nightclubs, any place with the reputation for street walkers or prostitutes. She went to them all. And at each place she left her picture—taped on a bathroom mirror, tacked to a hotel bulletin board, fastened to a corner phone booth. And on the back of each photo she wrote a note.

It wasn't too long before both the money and the pictures ran out, and Maria had to go home. The weary mother wept as the bus began its long journey back to her small village. It was a few weeks later that young Christina descended the hotel stairs. Her young face was tired. Her brown eyes no longer danced with youth but spoke of pain and fear. Her laughter was broken. Her dream had become a nightmare. A thousand times over she had longed to trade these countless beds for her secure pallet. Yet the little village was, in too many ways, too far away. As she reached the bottom of the stairs, her eyes noticed a familiar face. She looked again, and there on the lobby mirror was a small picture of her mother. Christina's eyes burned and her throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo. Written on the back was this compelling invitation. "Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn't matter. Please come home." She did." [Max Lucado, *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*. (Multnomah Press, 1986) pp. 158-159]

Conclusion

How did remembering God's grace in his life benefit Paul?

- It kept him humble.
- It kept his gratitude fresh.
- It urged him to greater efforts.

It was a constant encouragement to others. (v. 16)