

## Text 1 Tim 1:12-17

*<sup>12</sup> I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, <sup>13</sup> though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.*

*But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup> and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>15</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.*

*<sup>16</sup> But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.*

*<sup>17</sup> To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.<sup>[d]</sup> Amen.*

## Main Point

God's Grace is the only difference between a saved and a lost sinner

## Introduction (300)

### Hook

Have you ever felt that your sins are so bad that God could not possibly save you?

You feel that if God really knew your thoughts and desires, there is no way he would extend mercy and forgiveness to you.

Or maybe your feelings lead you the other way. You feel that it makes sense that God saved you because of all the things you can assist Him with. Because of all the useful things you can do for him.

If you feel either of these ways, you are not alone.

But how valid are those feelings? How true are those feelings?

Today we look to the testimony of a man, a testimony which illustrates for us that the **only** difference between a lost and a saved sinner is the Grace of God.

Neither the magnitude of your sin nor your possible usefulness is the point of difference.

## Outline

Today, in this passage, we will see that **God's Grace is the only difference between the lost and the saved sinner.**

We are going to look at this truth by breaking up our study into three points:

God's Grace brings:

1. God's Grace brings Humility to the Saved Sinner (v12-14)
2. God's Grace brings Hope to the Lost Sinner (15)
3. God's Grace brings Honor to the One Saviour (16-17)

## Part 1 – Humility to the Saved Sinner

### Exposition

#### Context

So let us begin with our first point: Humility to the Saved Sinner.

You will remember from last week that Paul is writing to Timothy to implore Timothy to stand against false teachers in the church in Ephesus.

These men, want to be “teachers of the law” but they are devoting themselves to myths and endless genealogies which only generates speculations and vain discussions.

These false teachers are nurturing doubt which was undermining the faith of the congregation and thus undermining the redemptive work of God through the Gospel. Their work was dangerous.

These false teachers are bad news and need to be silenced. Paul will continue to address this issue in verses 18-20.

#### Apostle by Christ's strength

But before he does that, he wants to make a point very clear: The only difference between these false teachers and himself is the Grace of God.

Paul does not want Timothy, or the congregation at Ephesus, to think that he is in any way more deserving than these false teachers. He has been saved, strengthened and appointed as an Apostle of Christ simply by the Grace of God, nothing of his merit.

In verse 12 we read:

*<sup>12</sup> I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service,*

God decided to appoint Paul and to give him the strength to share the Gospel.

It is only by God's grace that Paul has the strength to do what he does.

It is only by God's grace that he is in the position he is in.

So yes, these false teachers need to be silenced, and Paul's teaching needs to be listened to. Not because Paul is more deserving, but because God has done a work of Grace in his life.

### **Paul's past**

Paul shows his humility by being open with his past.

In verse 13 we read:

*<sup>13</sup> though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.*

Just in case people were tempted to think him morally superior, he says, no I am no better than anyone else. I am no better than these False teachers. I was the worst kind of sinner before God and before men.

He calls himself a Blasphemer.

Remember for the Jewish people, this is a serious sin. Blasphemy was to be punished by death. Paul admits himself guilty of that crime since he denied Jesus as the Messiah.

He was also a persecutor and insolent opponent. Some translations have “insolent opponent” translated as “Violent aggressor”.

Paul doesn't hide from his listeners what kind of man he was.

He was a violent aggressor, specifically against the Christians.

Although his own mentor, Gamaliel, urged caution (Acts 5:34-39) as the Pharisees reacted to the Christian, Saul doesn't heed the advice and he mercilessly, and violently took action against the Christians.

The accounts we have in Acts of Saul/Paul's action against the church depict an angry, violent, and ruthless man with no concern for human kindness.

- He had authority and strength and he used it to murder and wreak havoc.
- He was a bully sanctioned by the ruling power.
- He took every opportunity to cause pain and humiliation in this vulnerable group.

In his own words, he describes himself as an angry, blood thirsty bully, taking going to great lengths to shed blood and inflict harm.

In Acts 26:9-11 we read:

*<sup>9</sup> “I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. <sup>10</sup> And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only **locked up many of the saints in prison** after receiving authority from the chief priests, **but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.** <sup>11</sup> And I **punished them often in all the***

***synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.***

### **Illustration – Worst Bad guy**

Paul was not just a zealous pharisee doing his job. He was an angry, violent man who went the extra mile to cause pain and misery.

In books or movies, the bad guy is often depicted to do really nasty things. Cause that extra pain. Bringing harm to the innocent and to the vulnerable for no real reason

- Be it Scar from the Lion king who kill his own brother,
- or the nazi officer who makes everyone's life hell in WW2 stories,
- or Prince John who exploits his people to make himself rich in Robinhood.
- Or the English magistrate who murders William Wallace's Bride just to make a point.

The author or director imprints into your mind that this person is evil and deserves to be defeated, dispatched and put to death.

That is the picture Paul wants us to have of him.

- He is scar,
- he is the nazi officer,
- he is king john
- he is the English magistrate.

But this is no mere fiction, this is no clever character development. This is the reality of who Paul was.

He was a blasphemer of God and persecuted the bride of Christ.

In his own words, as far as he is concerned he is the “worst of sinners”.

## **Saul received mercy and Superabundant Grace**

And so what changed?

Starting from the middle of verse 13 we read:

*But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup> and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

Paul received mercy. God showed him grace with overflowing abundance.

Paul deserved to be dispatched, defeated and put to death, but instead he received grace, faith and love.

Paul was one of those persons whom everyone in the early church would have secretly hoped he would burn in hell. Yet God chose to rescue him, even him.

The only thing Paul brought to the table was his sin. God provided the grace, the faith and the love.

Paul was redeemed and rescued by God’s grace. This grace was enough not only to pay the penalty for his sins, and rescue him from the power of his sinful anger and bloodlust.

This grace is also enough to sustain him, strengthen him and empower him to do the work God has set before him.

God’s grace overflows in abundance beyond what he could hope or imagine.

## **Acted Ignorantly**

When Paul says here he “*acted ignorantly and in unbelief*” He is not saying that his lack of knowledge

made him more saveable, or that he was not responsible for his sin.

Paul was well aware of his violent actions and was responsible for them. He is not saying there are two kinds of sinners some who have a better chance of being saved.

No, he is saying that he had not yet understood and see with clarity the truths of the Gospel. He was still ignorant and in disbelief of the Gospel.

He was not like the Pharisees, who knew Jesus was performing miracles by the power of God and yet still rejected Him. He was not was like these false teachers who had understood, embraced, and seen with clarity the Gospel of Christ, but were rejecting that Gospel.

But even for the Pharisees and for these false teachers, it is not for us to judge if their knowledge of the Gospel was complete or if they acted ignorantly and in unbelief to some degree.

If they reject the gospel, there is no hope of salvation, but if they accept it and repent, they will be saved.

As far as we are concerned, there is always hope if they would repent and turn to Christ.

## Application

### **Good works by Grace, therefore humility**

So, just like Paul, we must not let others or ourselves believe that the good works we do are because we are somehow better than others.

Anything good you may achieve, any service you may render, or any sin you may overcome is all by God's grace in your life.

If you are an exemplary husband or a stellar wife, praise God and remember that you are strengthened to do those things by the Grace of God.

If you have had the privilege of study and are able to teach other about the Word of God, praise Him and remember it is all by the strength of God.

You may not have been a “*Blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent*” like Paul, but you know your own past and your own sins. You know that you too deserved punishment, yet God chose to save you and by his Grace he also chooses to employ you.

So as you serve, serve in humility. Serve knowing that you are not better in any way to the one who may be less capable.

Serve knowing that your skills, your knowledge and your willingness, only comes from God’s grace and nothing you've earned.

## **Link**

The only thing we brought to God was our sin. Once we recognised that, once we confess our need for a saviour, and turn to him in repentance, he rescued us and put us into his service.

That was true for Paul. That is true for many of us today. And that can be true to all who would turn to Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Which brings us to our second point:

## Part 2 – Hope to the Lost Sinner

### Exposition

#### **First of Trustworthy saying**

Paul continues explaining his testimony by saying, in verse 15:

*<sup>15</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.*

This is the first of 5 “trustworthy sayings” that Paul notes in the pastoral epistles. Paul seems to be referring to some sort of creed or catechism that was developed even then. It is a saying that summarizes some truth. A saying that the people in Ephesus would have been familiar with.

Even as early 64 AD, this shows that there was some sort of systematization of truth. Some was obviously wrong, but this specific saying is trustworthy.

#### **Theology of the trustworthy saying**

And it certainly is. this simple statement that we have in verse 15 summarizes for us the central message of the NT.

*that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

Each word a precious stone, together forming a crown of solid truth.

*Christ* proclaims Jesus as the Anointed One. The long-awaited messiah who would come to rescue the people of God.

- The one who had been promised to Adam to undo the curse of sin.
- The one who had been promised to Moses, who would lead the people out of the slavery of sin, and teach them God's truths.
- The one who Aaron, and every high priest foreshadowed, who would offer his life as the ultimate and final sacrifice.
- The one who had been promised to David, who's kingdom would have no end, who would reign with might and justice and love.

The anointed one, the Christ, as prophet, priest, and king has come. The long awaited Son of God had come.

*Jesus* – And he came not as a spirit or an angel. He came as a man. He became a man. A man who was called Jesus. Here we see the humanity of Jesus confessed. He was a man who got tired, ate, slept and depended on God in prayer. He was a man who faced the same trials we face. He was a man who resisted trials and endured great sufferings. He was a man who showed humility, humility even unto death.

But his humility did not start at his death. His humility started when he took the form of a servant and was born in the likeness of man.

When this Trustworthy saying says that He "*came into the world*," it proclaims his pre-existence and his incarnation.

The Son of God existed long before he entered the world. And when he did decide to enter into the world it was a miracle beyond what we could imagine. That the creator of heaven and earth would enter into his creation and submit himself to the bounds of a body,

the bounds of time and to interact and be in the presence of sin.

Because *the world* was no longer how God had originally created it. It was no longer very good. It was stained by sin on every side. Sin was the norm and sin was glorified. The world was storing up judgement against itself. Yet Jesus “came into the world”.

And why did he do that? Why did he humble himself? Why did he take on the office of priest, prophet and king? Why did he suffer?

*to save sinners*, not to save the righteous. Not to collect more data to judge the people. Not to free Israel from Roman oppression. Not to setup a political utopia. Not to give you a comfortable and easy life. Not to boost your self-esteem or to be your therapist or your life coach. He came to save sinners. He came to save those who had rebelled and committed countless crimes against the King of the universe.

He came to save those who are destined to hell. He came to save you and me.

In these few words, we have the central message of the New Testament. The central message of the entire bible. The central message of Christianity. The redemptive plan of God. In these few words we see

- the Person of Jesus Christ,
- the Work of Jesus Christ, and
- the recipients of His work.

So if someone asks you “What is Christianity about anyway” here you have a good answer and you can make it as short or as long as you want:

*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*

## **Paul is the foremost**

But I wonder, would you finish the sentence as Paul does?

*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, **of whom I am the foremost.***

This trustworthy saying was no arbitrary truth for Paul. It is not just a tidy formulation like some helpful scientific equation, which might prove helpful in a test. It is a truth that has personally affected and changed him.

So is Paul really the “worst of sinners”? If we were to rate the sinners would Paul really be at the top of the list?

We have seen a bit of Paul’s past, and we can understand there is a lot he regrets doing. One wonders how the conversations would have gone as he talked to people in the church who’s family members he had put to death. He had a dark past.

But the point is not that he made a list of all possible sinners and found himself at the top. The point is much more personal than that.

The point is that he recognises the seriousness of his sin. He recognizes how bad his actions, thoughts and desires are. And as far as he is concerned, he can’t imagine anyone being worst. With all the data he has about himself he considers himself the foremost of sinners.

## **Application – Hope for Paul, therefore hope for anyone – Gospel plea**

You know the seriousness of your sin. You know how deep it goes and how vile it is. And so in that sense, it is not wrong for you to say with Paul:

*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, **of whom I am the foremost.***

In that there is great hope for the lost sinner. Christ Jesus came to save Paul. He came to save me. He came to save the worst of sinners.

He came to save you too.

Do you feel your sins have made you too far gone? Do you feel that that there is no way God would show you mercy?

Don't listen to your feelings! Listen to this trustworthy saying *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

You may be convinced you are the worst of sinners, but that is exactly who Jesus came to save.

As you experience the weight of your sin, the weight of guilt and shame, let that weight drive you to your knees in dependence on Christ Jesus. Let it drive you to your knees in repentance. You can be saved, and you will be saved if you trust in Him.

## **Application – Keep praying and evangelising**

This is why He came to the world.

And for those of us who trust in Him, our greatest hope is that others would trust in him too. That others would be saved too.

And so we keep praying, we keep having conversations, we do not grow weary to proclaim this good news.

If someone like a blood thirsty, angry, murderer like Paul can be converted, we know there is hope for those people we are praying for and talking to. No one is too far gone, whatever they might say or do.

Not your bitter grandparents

Not your LGBTQ sibling

Not you self-assured colleague

Not even those persecuting the church.

*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

## **Present tense**

Now even as we pray for our lost family members and friends, even as we seek to follow Jesus as our Lord and king, we must remember that we are still sinners, we are a saved sinner, but still a sinner.

Notice that Paul uses the present tense when he says “of whom **I am** the foremost”. He doesn’t say of which I used to be the foremost. Even as he writes this letter, even after his conversion, even as an Apostle he still knows himself to be a sinner.

Friends this is crucial for us to grasp. Paul had not arrived. He was not perfect. He viewed himself as a sinner. This view of himself was not harmful. He had a healthy view of himself because it was an accurate view of himself.

As far as Paul is concerned, he is still the foremost of sinners.

## Application – Proper view of ourselves

And so even for those of you today who have trusted in Christ as your saviour and lord you are a saved sinner.

Saved, yes, but still a sinner.

When we view ourselves in this way we are freed and enabled to fight sin.

We don't try to hide our sin as if it was unthinkable, we confess it and know Jesus is faithful to forgive.

We don't doubt our salvation every time sinful desires and actions come up. When this happens, we turn to Jesus in repentance and in sorrow. We know there is still sin in us to be dealt with.

We don't kid ourselves that there will be no more temptations, but we take radical measures to resist temptations and ask for his grace to grow.

We don't blame our anger, or whatever else, on our circumstances or our genetics, but we take responsibility for it and confess it.

We don't see the difficulties of life as circumstances that are ruining our life, but as opportunities to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Recognising that you are a sinner, saved yes, but still a sinner pushes you to Christ as your redeemer every single day.

Do not turn to Christ as your therapist or your life coach, turn to Christ as your saviour who *came into the world to save sinners, **of whom I am the foremost.***

## Link

Paul gives hope to all lost sinners by sharing his own testimony.

But his testimony and the testimony of other saved sinners is not ultimately about them.

Our salvation is ultimately about God.

Which brings us to our third point this morning. Honor to the Saviour.

## Part 3 – Honor to the Saviour

### Exposition

#### **Paul saved to display the Patience of God**

Look with me again at verse 16.

*<sup>16</sup> But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.*

What is the ultimate reason Paul received mercy? That any of us receive mercy?

So that Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience.  
So that the attributes of God may be put on display.

- Paul deserved immediate judgment, but God was patient with Paul.
- Timothy deserved immediate judgment, but God was patient with Timothy.
- The false teachers deserved immediate judgment, but God was even patient with them.

God has been patient since the beginning of time. And even today, as every sinner in the whole world breaths in and out He is being patient.

When God saves someone, His attributes are put on display.

His patience is displayed as he holds back his justice and does not give them what they deserve.

And also His grace, his mercy, his love are all put on display when a sinner is saved as well as his righteous anger, his justice and his righteousness.

Here we have the purpose of salvation. Salvation is to the Glory of God alone. The reformers reclaimed this truth well.

Salvation is by Grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, all to the Glory of God alone.

### **Application – Your salvation is about God not you.**

Your salvation is not first about you, it is about God.

You are not the hero of your own story. God is.

You are not at the centre of your life. God is.

Oh we benefit from salvation, but our benefit is secondary to His glory.

We are like a mirror, which used to be cracked and dull unable to reflect any image. But now the mirror is repaired and polished so that it can reflect the glory of God. The mirror has been fixed, but that is not the primary advantage.

## **Saved to create a true worshiper**

Notice that Paul does not say that God saved him so that Paul could be a missionary, an apostle and write inspired letters.

Those were outworkings of a bigger purpose.

Paul was saved, and was being transformed in order to be a true worshiper of God. To proclaim the glory of God not only in what he did, but primarily in who he was.

His salvation was putting the greatness of God on display.

And his life was an example for many who would also believe in our Lord Jesus. Many who would be saved and transformed in order to display and proclaim the Glory of God in this life and forever.

## **God is worthy of worship**

Your life, your salvation, your transformation is all about God and to the glory of God because he is worthy! He is worthy of your absolute loyalty, your absolute worship. He is worthy of all glory.

Look at verse 17 again.

*<sup>17</sup> To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.<sup>[d]</sup> Amen.*

He is the king of the ages. Ever since the world began, he was ruling. Even before time began he was ruling. He was king in the time of Adam, in the time of Moses, in the time of David. He is king today and he will continue to be king in the age to come, where all will be made new. Then all will bow the knee to him, either in love or in fear.

He is immortal, incorruptible and imperishable. He cannot decay or change. Human bodies grow old and die. Mountains erode away, even the universe is in decline. But not God. He remains the same. Always true. Always strong. Always patient. Always gracious.

He is Invisible. Yes we can know him, and see his works, but

- He cannot be contained in the grasp of our finite human comprehension.
- He is without limits and boundaries.
- He cannot be scrutinised and dissected.

Our eyes and brains can see and comprehend wondrous things, but the Creator of the universe is outside of our capability.

He is the Only God. He is not one among many who happens to be strongest at the time. He has no rivals. No equals that threaten his power. No other who share his attributes. No other worthy of Glory.

This only God who is king of the ages, immortal and invisible came into this world to save sinners.

He died for you.

So let us marvel that such a God would do such a thing.

### **Application – Give God the honor and Glory**

Let us say with Paul: to God be *honor and glory forever and ever.*<sup>[d]</sup> Amen.

In all things:

As we choose how to spend our time and money:  
Honor and glory to God.

As we choose how you order our priorities: Honor and  
glory to God.

As we make long-term and short-term decisions: Honor  
and glory to God.

As we respond to trials and suffering: Honor and glory  
to God.

<sup>31</sup> So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do  
all to the glory of God. (1Cor 10:31)

Because he is worthy.

## Conclusion

Friends, in this passage, we see the effects of God's  
grace. Even though we are the worst of sinners, God  
saved us. He saves us, and strengthens all to display  
his Glory.

This must keep us humble. God's grace reminds us  
that anything good is God working in us and through  
us. God's grace brings humility to the saved sinner.

But God's grace also brings hope to the lost Sinner. If  
God is willing and able to save Paul, it is possible for  
anyone to be saved. Paul's example reminds us of the  
super abundance of God's grace.

*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners* and  
any who believe on him will be saved.

This salvation brings Honor to the Saviour. It brings  
glory to God. This is the ultimate purpose of salvation.  
Salvation puts his attributes on display and transforms

us into perfect worshipers. He is worthy of all worship, of all praise, of all adoration.

It is his grace that strengthens us, so let us be humble.

It is his grace that saves us, so let us have hope.

It is his grace, so let us give him the honour he deserves.

Let us pray

*<sup>17</sup> To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.<sup>[d]</sup> Amen.*