

JESUS CAME TO SAVE SINNERS

1 TIMOTHY 1:12-18

INTRODUCTION

We continue the beginning of our study today in the first pastoral letter to Timothy from the Apostle Paul. Even though this letter was written to Timothy regarding the issues he had to address as a pastor at the church of Ephesus; today our text is completely isolated from the rest of the context.

You see today we get to hear about Paul's testimony, but more importantly we get to learn about the Gospel. The true intricacies about the Gospel. One could assume that Paul decides to insert his testimony here as a contrast between what a true and faithful preacher of the Gospel should look like compared to the false teachers that were preaching legalism to this church as we studied last week.

Regardless, I believe that there is one true purpose of this passage. And that is that we are to emulate Paul's testimony in seeing and understanding our sinful state which will result in praise of our own salvation. You see the title of today's sermon is found in the heart of this text: "Jesus came to save sinners" He came to save sinners who recognize their sinful state and the desperate need we all have for God's mercy and grace.

So as we study this text today there are three types of people who it is intended for. First, for those who have grasped the wonderful truth of the Gospel and can see themselves through Paul's testimony. Second, those who are still blind to this Good News and are here today with the opportunity to open their eyes and their hearts to this marvelous truth. And finally, those who have been deceived in believing a false gospel or a partial-gospel and today the Holy Spirit can show you the fullness of the majesty of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So as we study our text today we will flow through these five truths that will give us a better understanding of the Gospel according to Christ:

1. Our Spiritual Blindness
2. God's Mercy

3. God's Grace
4. Our Sin
5. God's Patience

BIBLE PASSAGE

1 TIMOTHY 1:12-18

12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do his work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve him, **13** even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted his people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. **14** Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus. **15** This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them all. **16** But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life. **17** All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen. Amen.

1. OUR SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do his work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve him, 13 even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted his people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief.

Paul is transitioning from the previous verse which spoke about the Gospel God had entrusted him with. The same Gospel all of us have been entrusted with. To believe, to protect from falsehood and to share with a fallen world. Paul points to this truth with a thankful heart and a humble recognition that the work God has appointed him to could only be done by the strength God himself gives him. He was appointed to serve His King and he did it with a servant's heart. What a wonderful example to all of us.

Yet as we read in this text, this was not always the case in Paul's life. You see at one moment in his life he was completely blind to this truth. Not only was he blind to Jesus but he hated Him. He was a true enemy of the cross. It was his life's mission to destroy Christianity before it ever really took off. He persecuted Christians to death and his reputation was so well known that even upon his conversion other believers thought it was a ploy to capture them. Paul was blinded by Satan as we all are in our state of unbelief.

2 Corinthians 4:4

Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

Some of you sitting here today are still blind. And Christ knows that we are blind in our unbelief. Yet when we read Paul's words in this text stating that "*God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief.*"; I am reminded of Jesus' words on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"

In this passage we see Jesus looking down from the cross upon a scene that must have been devastating to Him. The Roman soldiers were gambling for His clothing ([John 19:23–24](#)); the criminals on the crosses to either side of Him were reviling Him ([Matthew 27:44](#)); the religious leaders were mocking Him ([Matthew 27:41–43](#)); and the crowd was blaspheming Him ([Matthew 27:39](#)). Surrounded by these unworthy sinners, Jesus prayed for them. "Father, forgive them..." a prayer of unmatched mercy and love.

Even in His agony, Jesus' concern was for the forgiveness of those who counted themselves among His enemies. He asked the Father to forgive the thieves on the cross who jeered at Him. He asked the Father to forgive the Roman soldiers who had mocked Him, spit on Him, beat Him, yanked out His beard, whipped Him, put a crown of thorns on His head, and nailed Him to the cross. Jesus asked forgiveness for the angry mob that had mocked Him and called for His crucifixion ([Mark 15:29–30](#)).

But we have to understand that Jesus' prayer, "Father, forgive them," does not mean that everyone was forgiven, unilaterally, without repentance and faith. It does mean that Jesus was willing to forgive them—forgiveness was, in fact, the reason He was on the cross. The words "Father, forgive them" show the merciful heart of God.

Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them," because He was putting into practice the principle He had taught in the [Sermon on the Mount](#): "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" ([Matthew 5:43–44](#)). Jesus, the persecuted, prayed for His persecutors.

Coupled with the willingness of Jesus to forgive His tormentors is the fact that they did not know what they were doing ([Luke 23:34](#)). This was the exact same case for Paul. The sinners who put Jesus on the cross were ignorant of the true weight of their actions. The soldiers personally held no ill will toward Him. They were simply following orders. This was how they normally treated condemned men, and they believed that He truly deserved it. They didn't know that they were killing the Son of God (see [1 Corinthians 2:8](#)). The mob didn't really know whom they were trying to destroy. The Jewish leaders had deceived them into believing that Jesus was a fake and a troublemaker ([Acts 3:17](#)). In praying "Father, forgive them," Jesus revealed His infinite mercy; He still loved them and would forgive them if only they would humble themselves and repent ([Matthew 18:14](#); [2 Peter 3:9](#)).

If they would only humble themselves and repent. You see repentance is the sign of spiritual sight. When we are no longer blind we get to see the depth of our sin and the need for our Savior. Yet someone might be asking themselves, "If I am ignorant to my sin how then could I be judged by it?" Or in the more common argument, "What happens to the tribe that lives in the jungle and has never heard of Jesus?"

We are all born in sin and condemned by it. And just because you have a lack of knowledge of the concept of gravity, it doesn't mean that gravity does not exist. In other words, if you do not know that you are a sinner; that does not mean you will not be judged for your sin.

Romans 3:23

For everyone has sinned; we have all fallen short of God's glorious standard.

Yes we are all blind to this truth at one time or another. Yet on the cross Jesus provided forgiveness for all those who would ever believe in Him ([Matthew 20:28](#)). Jesus paid the penalty for the sins that we commit in our ignorance, and even the ones we've committed deliberately. When we are [born again](#), we, too, become an answer to Jesus' prayer "Father, forgive them."

And Paul pointed to this when he said: "God had mercy on me"

2. GOD'S MERCY

13b *But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief.*

Why did God have mercy on Paul and not on the vast majority of Pharisees he belonged to? In Acts 23:6 we read that Paul was in the Sanhedrin when we called out: "My brothers, I am a **Pharisee**, the son of a **Pharisee**." God didn't have mercy on Paul because of his ignorance. We will actually see the purpose of his mercy further along in our study. But what we do know is that Paul was saved. He was once blind but then he could see.

God had mercy on Paul because God wanted to have mercy on Paul. There is no other reason why. We know this to be true because it is consistent with God's character.

When God said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" in [Exodus 33:19](#), the Lord meant that He shows mercy freely to anyone He chooses. The New Living Translation renders the meaning of the verse more explicitly: "I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose." The word *mercy* in [Exodus 33:19](#) means "kindness, compassion, and forgiveness." When God said, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," He meant that He would show kindness, compassion, and forgiveness to anyone He chooses. God's mercy—His wondrous compassion—leads Him to forgive sinners and withhold the punishment that is justly deserved.

In [Psalm 51:1-2](#), David cries out, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” Pleading for God’s mercy is asking Him to show kindness and withhold the judgment we deserve. That is the very definition of mercy.

So going back to the example of the tribe in the jungle that has never heard of Jesus. We have all sinned and therefore deserve God’s justice through His judgment. And God will have mercy on that tribe of ignorant sinners by sending someone to share the Good News with them. It was Jim Elliot and his missionary friends that gave their lives to reach an unreached tribe of ignorant sinners. And the same man who murdered him, came to the knowledge of Christ, repented and believed and went on to spread the Gospel to the world. That is mercy like no other. We go on to read...

3. GOD’S GRACE

14 Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus.

Why did I mention at the beginning of our study today that we would get to see the intricacies of the Gospel? Well because at the heart of the Gospel we find mercy and we find grace. You see mercy as we already established leads God to forgive us and withhold the punishment that we justly deserved. Yet coupled with grace it really becomes something so much greater. Because where mercy withholds, grace gives abundantly.

We deserve nothing good from God. God does not owe us any good thing. What good we experience is a result of the grace of God ([Ephesians 2:5](#)). *Grace* is simply defined as “unmerited favor.” God favors us—He shows us approval and kindness—in blessing us with good things that we do not deserve and could never earn. That is why Paul speaks of the Lord’s saving grace in his life that filled him with faith that comes from Jesus himself! Paul’s faith came from the Lord, it was a gift that allowed him to believe. You see saving grace is that special blessing whereby God sovereignly bestows unmerited divine intervention upon His elect for their regeneration and sanctification. Saving faith is not possible without divine election.

We know this to be true by Jesus’ own interaction with Nicodemus. Quite possibly the most famous verse in of all of Scripture is found in this very interaction. *John*

3:16 - *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* And in the context of this verse Jesus was asked how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In other words, how are we saved? And He answers, you have to be born again. To Nicodemus' surprise, he asks how can I go back into my mother's womb? Yet we know that was not what Jesus was referring to.

Saving grace requires and external action. Being dead in our sins and our trespasses we need someone to make us alive again. To be born again. And Jesus says that just as the wind blows from one direction to another and we don't know where it is coming nor where it is going so it is with "saving grace". God moves through His Spirit to open the eyes of the sinner. That's the action that is required, that's His intervention. Just as Ebenezer Scrooge was guided by three spirits to change his heart and repent of his hate in order to love, we too have to be shown our sin in order to repent and have our heart of stone changed to one of love. This was the case in Paul's life as we go on to read...

4. OUR SINFUL STATE

15 This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all.

So we know that we are blind to this truth, yet through God's mercy and His grace we arrive at this vital realization; that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of which you and I are among.

This is the beautiful summary of the Gospel in one verse: *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"* This was Paul's revelation on the road to Damascus. He encountered the resurrected Christ and came to understand that his sin was the worst of all. He persecuted Christ himself and he did it out of pride and a violent heart. He found actual pleasure in his sin of seeking and killing those who followed the Way. So when his eyes were open to his sin the depths of his despair were almost inconsolable. It was as if in a fit of rage a man decides to kill his worst enemy by poisoning his food only to realize that his beloved son ate the food instead.

Yes Paul had the right to declare the awful truth of being the worst sinner of all, yet we too have to come to this realization. If we grasp the depth of our sin towards Jesus the end result will always be joy. Because as we weep over our sin Jesus wipes the tears from our eyes to embrace us with His salvation and let us know that we have been forgiven through His love for us.

“Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now I’m found, was blind but now I see.”

And finally we see God’s patience with us who have believed...

5. GOD’S PATIENCE

16 But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.

We come to the purpose of God’s mercy in Paul’s life. And it was to show the great patience of Christ towards unrepentant sinners. He was the prime example. So that no one could ever think that I am not worthy of being saved. But you might be asking yourself; “If God is who intervenes in our salvation through His saving grace, then what is the point of His patience?” Could He just not snap His fingers and everyone be saved? Well let us dive into this a little more.

2 Peter 3:8-9

“But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Here Peter refers to the mocking of the world concerning the Second Coming of Christ. Since He has not come yet, the skeptics say this is the evidence that there is no Christ and there is no Second Coming. In reality, Peter informs us that the fact Christ has not come is a display of God’s patience. Why has He not come? Because all of His people are not yet saved, and He is long-suffering and will continue to be until all of the elect have been gathered into a saving relationship with Christ. The key text is “He is patient toward you,” not wishing for any of you to perish. Who

are the “you” in this verse? If we go to the first letter of Peter’s writing to whom he refers to as the “beloved” we will find out that the beloved are the elect. Peter writes: “*Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours...make every effort to confirm your calling and election.*” (2 Peter 1:1–2,10). So this patience of God toward “the elect” means that He will not send His Son to bring all things to a consummation and final judgment until all of the elect are gathered.

Yes I know that the intricacies of salvation can be complex because we are studying the mind of God which He has revealed to us in the Scriptures. Yet the simplicity of the Gospel is found again in this one truth: Jesus Christ came to the world to save sinners, of which you and I are among. But if you say, “I am not a sinner” how can this apply to you? Do not wait any longer for if you are here today then salvation has come to your life.

No one who truly loves Christ would ever say, “I wish I was saved later in life” If any of you are like me I wish I had come to Christ much sooner than I did. Yet He was patient with me and knew the exact moment it would occur. And ever since, I too have shared in Paul’s praise of our salvation just as he shares in v. 17...

THE PRAISE OF OUR SALVATION

17 All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen.

CONCLUSION

So let us recap; we know that we are all born spiritually blind. Ignorant of the Gospel. Yet God shows His mercy in that we do not get what we deserve and He shows us His grace in that we are given what we don’t deserve. But all of this starts when we recognize our sin. And the beautiful patience of God promises us that even the worst sinner can repent and be saved. No one here is too far gone that the reach of Jesus’ arms of love cannot embrace.

And you might be asking yourself, “well then how in the world do I know if I am saved?” It is seen in your love for Christ and your hate towards your sin. It is seen in a transformed life. A before and after. It is seen in the very fact that you are asking yourself that very question. You see indifference is the clearest sign of an

unrepentant sinner. For we are all sinners saved by grace but that grace is only evident in the person that has repented and believed.

The Gospel is simply this: We all have sinned against a perfect and Holy God. We deserve His judgement yet He offers His grace through the death of His son Jesus Christ. If we repent of our sin and believe that Christ died for us, then we are saved. As simple as that. Repent and believe.

Don't think about anyone else. Does this mean my grandma isn't saved or my dad isn't saved? And don't let your thoughts keep wandering to this internal ethical debate that questions God's will towards those who are to be saved. Yes there are other views of how God works in His salvation but that is irrelevant when it comes to our own salvation. This is about you before God recognizing who He is and who you are so that you may repent and believe. His forgiveness is here for you to accept and embrace. To give you not only eternal life but also a live more abundant and free. Free of sin, free of guilt, free of shame. Full of joy, full of peace and full of eternal purpose and meaning. Amen.

Sources:

www.gotquestions.org

www.ligonier.org