

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Introduction

1. Last week we learned how Paul left Timothy at Ephesus to stop certain men from spreading false teaching:
 - a. We saw how they were teaching a different Gospel, one based on myths and endless genealogies, speculation, and a form of legalism based on their ignorance in understanding the Old Testament Law
 - b. Such teaching gave rise to mere speculation and meaningless discussions and did nothing to further God's redemptive plan which is by grace through faith
 - c. In contrast, Paul's and Timothy's teaching was sound and, as Paul wrote in v. 11, was **"according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I [Paul] have been entrusted."**
2. Ultimately, these men were teaching a works-based salvation, apparently claiming that believers had to live according to the Old Testament civil and ceremonial laws in order to be saved (e.g. food laws, circumcision, Sabbath keeping, etc.)
3. Paul countered this by revealing their ignorance of the purpose of the Old Testament Law—the Law wasn't made for righteous people but sinners, and its purpose was to act as a tutor to lead them to faith in Jesus Christ through the Gospel
4. Paul isn't quite finished with what he started in v. 1:3 (his assignment for Timothy) and will pick it up again in vs. 18-20, but he digresses for a bit in vs. 12-17 to use his own life and ministry as an example to counter the false teaching:
 - a. He declared that his life and ministry were a RESULT of God's mercy and grace, not works (1:11-14)
 - b. He declared that his life and ministry were an EXAMPLE of the patience of Jesus Christ (1:15-16)
 - c. He then finishes up this section with praise for Jesus Christ (1:17)

A. Paul declared that his life and ministry were a RESULT of God's mercy and grace, not works (1:11-14)

1. He begins by expressing his gratitude to Jesus for appointing him to the ministry of the Gospel (READ 1:11):
 - a. Paul was grateful to Jesus for providing the strength he needed to carry out his ministry:
 - 1) He expressed this thankfulness elsewhere (READ Acts 9:22; Philippians 4:11-13; 2 Timothy 4:16-17)
 - 2) The grammar here suggests that this was a continual thing for Paul; he was continually grateful for how the Lord strengthened him
 - b. Paul makes an interesting statement here claiming the reason the Lord strengthened him was, **"He considered me faithful"**:
 - 1) The key to understanding this statement is to not separate it from the phrase that follows it: **"putting me into service"**
 - 2) Paul is not claiming that he was worthy of salvation, but rather that the Jesus deemed him faithful or trustworthy in regard to putting him into ministry

- 3) Jesus knew that Paul would be a faithful servant and would carry out the ministry Jesus gave him, and this is why He announced His plan for Paul at his conversion (READ Acts 26:16-18)
2. Paul was grateful because he knew that his call to ministry was something he did not deserve (1:13-14):
 - a. When the Lord interrupted Paul's life on the road to Damascus, Paul was a wicked man (READ 13a):
 - 1) He was a "**blasphemer**" which is someone who speaks evil of God
 - 2) He was a "**persecutor**" of Christians
 - 3) He was a "**violent aggressor**" which describes someone who thinks they are superior to others and mistreats them with violence
 - 4) Luke describes Paul's former life as one of "**ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women...delivering them into prison**" (Acts 8:3) and "**breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord**" (Acts 9:1)
 - 5) We don't just have to take Luke's word for it, however; listen to how Paul described his actions:
 - a) Before King Agrippa (READ Acts 26:9-11)
 - b) Galatians 1:13: "**For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it**" (Galatians 1:13)
 - c) 1 Corinthians 15:9: "**I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God**"
 - b. In spite of all of this, Jesus showed mercy and grace to Paul (READ 13b-14):
 - 1) Grace and mercy go hand in hand, and while they are different, they complement one another
 - 2) Mercy is NOT RECEIVING something we deserve:
 - a) When it comes to God's mercy it means that we don't receive the judgment and condemnation we deserve because of our sin, and that was certainly true of Paul
 - b) Paul says that he was shown mercy because he acted "**ignorantly in unbelief**"
 - c) He is not saying here that he deserved God's mercy because he didn't sin intentionally; rather he recognized that God treats unintentional sins differently than intentional
 - d) In fact, the OT Law had different provisions and penalties for each, with the penalties for unintentional sins being much less severe than intentional sins
 - e) Paul is simply recognizing this fact here and suggesting that God took his ignorance into account when extending His mercy to him
 - 3) The compliment to mercy is grace, and grace is RECEIVING something we don't deserve:
 - a) When it comes to God's grace it means that we receive forgiveness and the gift of eternal life, something we DO NOT deserve because of our sin
 - b) Paul wrote that because of the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus, the Lord's grace was "**more than abundant**"; in other words, Paul is admitting that while his sins were great, God's grace was more
 - c) We see a similar statement by Paul in Romans 5:20 where he wrote that "**where sin increased, grace abounded all the more**"

3. What Paul was sharing with Timothy was that his life and ministry were the RESULT of God's mercy and grace, not obedience to the Old Testament Law:
 - a. The false teachers were teaching all kinds of contrary doctrines, including that salvation came by works of the Law
 - b. But Paul uses his own experience to demonstrate that's not true
 - c. He of all people did not deserve God's mercy and grace but received it anyway because of the love and faith found only in Jesus Christ

4. Takeaway:
 - a. How often do you think of that when it comes to your own life?
 - b. Do you ever wonder what your life would have been like without Christ?
 - c. Do you genuinely believe that all that you are and everything you have in this life and the next is because of the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ?
 - d. READ Ephesians 2:8-19

B. Paul declared that his life and ministry were an EXAMPLE of the patience of Jesus Christ (1:15-16)

1. Paul begins with what he says is a **"trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance"** (READ 1:15a):
 - a. Paul is fond of this phrase and used it four other times in the letters to Timothy and Titus to stress the importance of a point he was making (READ 1 Timothy 4:9-9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:1; 3:4-8)
 - b. Here, the trustworthy statement is that **"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"**:
 - 1) This is the heart and soul of the Gospel
 - 2) Jesus said of Himself, **"For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost"** (Matthew 18:11)
 - 3) In John 3:17 we read, **"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him"**
 - 4) In Romans 5:8 we read, **"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."**
 - c. Paul recognized the importance of this statement because he considered himself the **"foremost"** of sinners (1: 15c): **"among whom I am foremost of all"**:
 - 1) What we can't see here in the English is the emphasis Paul places on this statement—he places the word translated **"foremost"** before the verb and then repeats the pronoun **"I"**
 - 2) He also uses the present tense so we know he was talking about his life after his conversion (not before)—and this shouldn't shock us because Paul reveals his own struggle with sin in Romans 7:14ff
 - 3) There's been a fair amount of debate over exactly what Paul meant and at least half a dozen interpretations proposed
 - 4) The NET and NIV translate Paul's words to mean that he was the worst of all sinners
 - 5) However, most use the word foremost meaning that Paul was the most prominent or well known among sinners, which would make sense for two reasons:
 - a) He was well known for his past as a **"blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor"** as he described earlier (1:13)
 - b) It also fits into what Paul wrote next

2. As the most prominent among sinners, he received mercy as a demonstration of Jesus' patience (READ 1:16; LSB): **"Yet for this reason I was shown mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Christ Jesus might demonstrate all His patience as an example for those who are going to believe upon Him for eternal life."**
 - a. In other words, since Jesus showed mercy to Paul—one of the most prominent and well-known sinners—there is hope for others
 - b. Paul's life served as an example of the kind of longsuffering and incredible patience God exercises when offering mercy and grace to sinners
 - c. Patience is a huge part of God's redemptive plan:
 - 1) Peter wrote that during the nearly 100 years that Noah constructed the ark the patience of God was waiting for people to repent (1 Peter 3:20)
 - 2) Even now, Peter says that the reason Jesus has not returned is not because he's slow, but because the Lord is patient, not willing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9)
 - 3) Later he writes (v. 15) that we should consider the patience of the Lord as salvation
 - 4) Finally, Paul wrote in Romans 2:4 that no one should take God's kindness, forbearance and patience for granted because God uses such kindness to lead mankind to repentance
 - d. Paul certainly recognized the Lord's patience with him, and realized that Jesus was using him as a demonstration of that patience for anyone who was going to believe in Jesus for eternal life
 - e. His life and ministry were an EXAMPLE of the patience of Jesus Christ, in essence, they were an example of the Gospel
3. Takeaway:
 - a. Do you ever think about how your life might be an example to others of God's patience, mercy and grace that is available to them?
 - b. The unsaved often think of Christians as arrogant, self-righteous, and judgmental, and much of this is simply because they hate the truth, Jesus and us by extension—there's not much we can do about that
 - c. However, I wonder how much of it comes from what we project when we judge the unsaved for their sin
 - d. I think we sometimes forget the incredible patience Jesus exercised with us, and the depths to which his mercy and grace had to reach, in order to save us
 - e. If we were really honest, how many of us would identify with Paul when he said, **"among whom I am foremost"**?
 - f. I wonder if we projected that, how many might say, "If Jesus could save him or her, can he not save me?"

Conclusion: Paul closes out this section with a wonderful doxology of praise for what Jesus did with his life; may it be our praise as well (READ 1:17)