

Christ Jesus came to save sinners

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 March 2016

Preacher: Rev. Andrew Longwe

[0 : 00] Let me invite you to take God's word and turn back with me to 1st Timothy in chapter 1 verses 12 to 17. Verse 15 reads, The saying is trustworthy and deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst.

I wonder if we could begin this morning by me asking you to do a little thought experiment. I want you in your own imagination and in your mind's eye to think of the worst person you know.

Think of that person that causes you to shrink back from sharing the gospel with them because there's something that you detect about their life that seems to make you feel that there's literally nothing in this world that can change them.

Think of that person that some people might describe of as unreachable or unredeemable. Might be a drug dealer, prostitute, gangster, maybe even a colleague, maybe even a family member.

[1 : 31] Think of that person. Think of that person. Think of that person fixed in your mind's eye. Let me ask you this question. Do you have deep down in your soul confidence in Jesus and his gospel that he could save them?

Do you have a deep seated and unshakable confidence in Jesus Christ and the good news of the cross that he can save and transform even the person who can be described as unredeemable and as unreachable?

I ask that question because in this passage before us today we are given reason as to why we should have confidence in Jesus Christ and the gospel. Here we read about a man called Paul who described himself as the worst sinner who ever lived and yet he was to be a man saved by Christ and his gospel.

And by God's enabling this morning what I'd like us to think about the time that we have together is why we should have confidence in Jesus Christ and his gospel.

I don't know what person you had in your mind's eye but if I'm honest it doesn't really matter. But what does really matter is this.

[2 : 56] Your vision of Jesus Christ and his gospel. What really matters this morning is your vision of Jesus Christ and his gospel.

It matters more than anything else in this world. Four years ago I lived in Edinburgh with Mardone with Alison and I learned some of the greatest lessons in my life.

They're in their home with them spending time in prayer and fellowship learning great lessons about life in terms of raising children. I was there when David was born.

I was there when Finlay was born too. At college I learned many great lessons in theology and studying the Bible. But one of the greatest lessons I learned in my time in Edinburgh was out in the streets of Edinburgh doing evangelism.

I have a friend called Ewan. He works for a church in the north of the city. Holyrood Abbey Church. Let me tell you a bit about Ewan. He's a man of God with a daring faith and scared of no man.

[3 : 54] Ewan had a very successful career as a doctor and then gave it up to become an evangelist in a church. Every time I spend time with Ewan I honestly feel like I'm in the presence of Jesus.

And the great lesson that I learned there in the streets of Edinburgh doing evangelism with Ewan was one day when we were out on a Monday afternoon giving gospel invitations and gospel tracts to various shopkeepers and various shop owners.

And as we went in shop, out of one shop into the next, one office into the next, sharing the gospel and inviting them along to church. I'll never forget when we, on our travels, when we came along London Road and the next shop that was there for us to go into was a tattoo and piercing parlour.

And for some same reason in my head I thought at that moment, well we'll not be doing this one. We'll just go on to the next one. Because they don't need the gospel.

And then I heard Ewan's voice say, Andy. And I turned round and there he was standing at the door of this tattoo piercing parlour and he says, you'll do this one. In that moment I had subconsciously said that these people were beyond the gospel.

[5 : 08] I had deemed them unworthy of the grace of God. I share that story deeply embarrassed and deeply ashamed that I could ever think like that.

But I thought like that because my vision and my confidence in Jesus Christ was so small. And so the reason for preaching in this passage and in this text this morning is that we may be stirred up to have a great vision of Jesus Christ and his gospel.

Paul is writing to Timothy his young protégé. And he's writing this letter to give him counsel and instruction regarding the gospel ministry. And we read there in verses 1 to 11 about how Paul said to Timothy, his true child in the faith, Timothy, I want you to silence men who are about false teaching, false doctrine, who are dabbling with myths and genealogies, who even have a wrong understanding of the law.

I want you to silence them and I want you to bring their thinking into true accordance with the glorious gospel. Just look back there in your Bibles, verse 3. As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.

Then glance your eye down to verse 11. So that all doctrine may be in accordance with the gospel of the glory or the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted to.

[6 : 36] Underlying everything that Paul says in this first chapter is the fact that he wants his young protégé to keep the gospel and Jesus Christ central to everything he has in ministry.

And if we're going to be the church of Jesus Christ, then we need to have the gospel central to everything that we're about and Christ central to everything that we are.

Now what's so amazing about this passage is that Paul, who wants to inspire Timothy with a greater and a more glorious vision of the gospel, is he chooses to do it so by sharing his own personal testimony.

It's one of the most beautiful sections in all of scripture where Paul, his young prodigy, shares his testimony in order to give him greater confidence in the gospel.

This is because Paul was a man who was permanently enraptured by Christ and his good news. A man perpetually stunned in the sheer wonder of the grace of God lavished upon him.

[7 : 43] That's why in verse 12 he bursts into thanksgiving and praising. He says, I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he's judged me faithful, appointing me to his service.

Paul was a man amazed that Christ would ever forgive him and ever entrust him with the gospel. And he wanted the same to be true in Timothy. And so what I'd like us to do this morning is to look at verses 13 to 17 under three very simple headings.

A great testimony, number one. A great transformation, number two. And a great celebration, number three.

Great testimony, great transformation and great celebration. So what was Paul's great testimony? Look at verse 13.

Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. Literally violent man.

[8 : 41] In these three to four words Paul describes himself as nothing less than a terrorist. The sort of man who would kill anyone who disagreed with anything he believed in.

A man, if you were to meet in the street, you would quake in your boots and you would feel so uncomfortable around that you would want to run a million miles. He would put the same fear in you that any Islamic ISIS terrorist would today.

Now I want all of us to have a very clear picture of Paul's past. So let me invite you to take your Bibles and turn back to Acts chapter 8. Acts chapter 8. If you're using the same Bible that's on the pew, it's on page 1104.

I want us to have a very clear picture of what Paul was like before he came to Christ. You know that Paul's name before he was called Paul was Saul. And the very first time we meet Paul, we meet him at a mob style murder.

Of a Christian called Stephen. Acts chapter 8 verse 1. Stephen has just been stoned. And we read in verse 1.

[9 : 55] And Saul, Paul of Tarsus. Saul of Tarsus, Paul approved of his execution. Look down at verse 3. After this, Paul was ravaging the church.

Entering house after house. He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Look over to chapter 9 verse 1 and 2. But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, that is the Christian faith, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Then turn over to chapter 22 of Acts. Acts chapter 2. Verse 4.

I persecuted this way to the death, binding and delivering them to prison, both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of the elders can bear witness with me.

Turn over to Acts chapter 2. From them I received letters to the brothers. And I journeyed towards Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

[11 : 17] Turn over one more time. Acts chapter 26. It's so important that we see what Paul was like in his past. This is his own testimony. Acts chapter 26, verses 9 to 11.

I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 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. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme and enraging fury against them.

I persecuted them even to foreign cities. You get the kind of picture of this man. He was nothing less than a radical extremist terrorist.

He's definitely the sort of guy, if you and I were to meet, would say, he's unreachable and he's unredeemable. Today, many of us may be tempted to think of the ISIS terrorists in that way, beyond the reach of the gospel.

[12 : 25] We may be tempted to write them off as unredeemable. But as we're going to see in this passage, no terrorist is beyond the mercy and the grace of God.

According to 1 Timothy chapter 1, we must have a vision and understanding of the gospel that can save even the most notorious terrorists. You know the interesting thing about Paul is that he did not exaggerate his past.

He was a blasphemer. He denounced God. He was a persecutor. He killed people. He dragged them out of their homes.

He dragged them to prison. He cast his word against them that they would be stoned to death. He was a violent man. He himself was involved in the stoning and in the death.

Paul was an archer enemy of Christ and the church. In a word, Paul was lost.

[13 : 25] It's the way the Bible describes people who are without Christ. Lost. That's what exactly Paul was. Lost. And if you're here this morning and you don't have a relationship with Jesus, the Bible would say of you that you're lost.

Let me give you all this definition of what it means to be lost. It's to have a convinced blindness and a misdirected love which ultimately leads to eternal damnation.

It is to have a convinced blindness. A misdirected love that ultimately leads to eternal damnation.

Paul had a convinced blindness. He was a Jew who thought that it was his life's mission and life's goal to stamp out this distortion of the Judaism called Christianity.

He had a misdirected love. He was zealous about the God he called Yahweh. And yet he missed the Messiah. And he missed Jesus Christ. And he was on a path that ultimately would lead to his eternal damnation.

[14 : 29] Even there when Paul saw Stephen dying and Stephen said, I see Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Paul missed the fact that Jesus was the Messiah.

And yet God in his grace and his mercy would stop Paul in his tracks as he was breathing out murderous threats against the Christians.

And the Lord Jesus Christ would cry in Acts chapter 9, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Jesus Christ would stop him in his tracks and he would arrest him by his own grace and mercy.

Paul had blasphemed against Christ. Paul who had obstinately denied the truths of the Christian faith. Paul had sought to destroy the Christian church. Paul who would even go to far off cities to kill Christians.

Paul who had a pathological hatred for Christ and his gospel was saved by Christ. Christ found this man who was lost in his sin.

[15 : 35] Christ called this man. Christ drew him to himself by his irresistible grace. And Christ saved this man. And we need to see that. Because it's only when we see that do we realize how great, how glorious, our saviour and his gospel is.

Paul was on the path to eternal damnation. But God in his abundant grace and mercy saved him. That explains why Paul could see after his conversion.

God demonstrates his own love in this. That while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. You know, brothers and sisters, we must place our confidence solely in Jesus Christ and his gospel alone.

He alone is the one who can save. He alone is the one who can take the lost in our world. And he can call them and he can bring them into his own flock. Brothers and sisters, we need to hear this.

The wrath of God is real. There is a real hell. There is a real lostness in our world that puts real people in real danger of the only real God.

[16 : 54] And this means you and I better get real about this. Our confidence must be placed solely upon Jesus Christ and his gospel who can save those who are lost.

Even the worst terrorists. So that's Paul's great testimony. Persecutor, blasphemer, violent man. Called by Christ, saved by Christ.

Leads us secondly to Paul's great transformation. Here's a question. What transformed Paul? What transformed this man from being a terrorist to being a man who was so in love with Christ that he would become the greatest missionary of the first century church?

Faith in Jesus Christ. You know, faith stands for that little acronym you learn when you're a little boy. Forsaking all. Paul, I trust in him.

Forsaking all. I trust in him. Paul had forsook all and he placed his trust in Christ. As Hugh said last night, Paul looked to Christ and he was saved. Paul turned away from his life and he turned to Christ.

[18 : 09] And the power of the gospel took hold of him. The spirit of God came upon him. Regenerated him. He was born again of the Holy Spirit. Given a new heart. New affections. New desires. What transformed Paul?

Jesus Christ and his mercy and his grace. That's why we should place our confidence in the gospel. Because it alone can transform. You see there in verses 13 and 14, Paul says that, But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief.

And the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. And that clause, because I acted in ignorance and unbelief, is not an attempt to minimize Paul's guiltiness.

Because neither ignorance or unbelief can be an excuse for Paul's sin against the Lord or his church. Now as we read in verse 14, he was forgiven only because of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was Christ and his gospel that were responsible for saving him and transforming him. You know when Paul was lost, he had nothing.

[19 : 20] You know one of the great lies of Satan is he convinces the lost people of the world that they have everything they need. He convinces you that your family is enough, your friends enough, your home is enough, all your material belongings are enough.

And you think you have everything when you're lost. But you actually have nothing. But when Paul came to Christ and the gospel transformed him, he finally did have everything.

Because in Christ, we have everything. We see that in verse 14, the gospel provided for Paul a waterfall of God's grace and love. He says there, And the grace of our Lord overflowed for me.

The picture is one of great abundance, a waterfall of God's grace. For me with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. You know, I love this verse because Paul actually invents a word here.

Such is the greatness of God's grace in this verse. He takes two verbs and he joins them together. And he literally says, God's grace super abounded to me. That is to say that he experienced something that you could not experience anywhere else in life apart from in God, in Christ, in the gospel.

[20 : 40] And notice what lies at the heart of the gospel. Grace. God's undeserved favor towards us. God's unmerited, God's unearned favor.

Grace means we are saved not based on anything that we could ever do, but by God alone. By his mercy and grace. Which is found nowhere else apart from Jesus Christ.

And do you know what the effect of God's abundant grace was in the apostle's life? It led him to become a man of faith and love. And do you see the contrast?

He said he was a man who acted in unbelief. But now in his union with Christ, he's a man of faith. He once had a hatred towards the Christians in Christ.

And he now says that in his union with Christ, he's a man of love. You see, in Christ, we have everything. In Christ, we have everything that we're lacking.

[21 : 42] Faith and love. John Calvin wrote in this verse that God so completely changed him that he'd become a totally different and new man. That's what Paul wrote himself.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. And all the time, Paul is wanting Timothy, and he's wanting us to see that our confidence should lie solely in Christ and in his gospel alone.

Paul wants Timothy to have a great and grand vision of Jesus Christ and his gospel. And so let me ask you this. Do you have it? Do you have a great vision of Christ and his gospel?

When John Bunyan wrote his own biography, he entitled it, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners. That's exactly what Paul experienced in his great transformation.

And if you're a Christian here, that's exactly what you've experienced. You know, it's amazing that Paul, in his encouragement to Timothy, he doesn't stop there as he tries to press in the reality of this great transformation and as he tries to impress upon young Timothy's mind how his confidence should be in the gospel.

[22 : 58] He goes on in verse 15 and he says, Look, this is all in relation to Christ's purpose and coming into this world. And here Paul puts all the emphasis on the perfect transworthiness of the gospel.

Verse 15. 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.

Right in that verse we see the two great doctrines of the Christian faith. The incarnation and redemption. Christ came into this world. That is, he left glory.

He left that place where he had unhindered fellowship with his Father and with his Spirit. And he left it for this sin-sick world. Christ came. The incarnation.

He took upon himself flesh. He added humanity to his divinity. He came into the world to do what? To save. To accomplish redemption.

[24 : 00] To do that thing that Paul experienced here. Salvation in Christ alone. By faith alone. Because of the grace of God alone. Don't miss the word sinners.

And if you know anything about Paul, he was once a Pharisee. And so this word has taken on a whole new meaning for him. Do you remember what Pharisees thought when they spoke about being a sinner?

A sinner was a tax collector or a prostitute. A sinner was a Gentile. An unclean person. A dirty person. And here Paul says, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Because Paul understood for the first time in his life that he was a sinner. That all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That all are sinners.

Both Jew and Gentile. Such is the great transformation in his life that he's able to see for the first time that he's a sinner. I think there's a lesson there for us that every one of us should always see every person in this world as sinners all the same.

[25 : 13] But do you know it's even more staggering? He says that he is the foremost sinner of whom I am the foremost, of whom I am the worst.

Such a statement is to be stood in the light of the fact that he's met with Christ and he's seen himself for the very first time and for who he truly is. As he's gazed upon Christ, as he's heard the voice of Christ calling him, he's finally discovered who he truly is.

Notice he doesn't say, I was the worst sinner. Notice he says, I am the worst sinner. Paul had this view of himself even as a Christian. And see if you're honest, every one of us here this morning, if we're in Christ, should view ourselves as the foremost sinner that there is.

Because only we know what it is to look and gaze into the mirror of God's word or to gaze in Christ and see ourselves for who we truly are. When I asked you that question at the beginning, fix your mind upon someone, the worst person that you know.

If you ever asked that again, the person that should come to your mind is yourself. You're the only person that knows your own sins. You're the only person that knows your wickedness and your waywardness.

[26 : 34] And Paul goes further. He still wants to impress upon young Timothy and us today the great confidence that he should have in the gospel. And so look at verse 16. He says, But I receive mercy for this reason that in me as the foremost sinner Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who are to believe in him for eternal life.

The reason for Paul reminding us of his testimony that he was the foremost sinner was that we might see him as a primary example of the fact that Christ can forgive anyone.

If God could do it with Paul, then God can do it with anyone. That was to encourage young Timothy. That was to stir up young Timothy's confidence in the gospel. If God could save Paul, then God could save anyone.

Maybe you're here this morning and you think you're beyond the pale of the gospel. No one's beyond the pale of the gospel. This section of scripture says you're not.

You must repent and believe and trust in Christ and you shall be saved. Just a beautiful expression in this verse is where he speaks there of God's perfect patience.

[27 : 45] God was patient with Paul, with Saul of Tarsus, giving him the time that he would come to that place where he'd cry out for God, where Christ would arrest him by his grace.

God has been extremely patient with all of us here. Those who are in Christ and even those of you who are outside of Christ. He's patient. That it may lead you to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

It's interesting that Paul goes on to say that it's all about that others might know eternal life. Eternal life there doesn't mean the longevity of life. It literally means the quality of life that's to be experienced in Christ.

You see, in the gospel and in Christ, we experience rescue from the power of sin. We experience rescue from the penalty of sin. And then we experience the abundant life in Christ.

A life like no other. And that is exactly what Paul had discovered when he placed his faith in Christ. Very briefly and finally, the great transformation leads to a great celebration.

[29 : 00] And in that last verse, verse 17, we have the great celebration, the great doxology of Paul. You see, after reminding himself of the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, which had begun with thanksgiving in verse 12, Paul now ends it with even greater thanksgiving.

And notice that Paul's erupts into the celebration in a way that is reverent, in a way that's joyful, and in a way that he ascribes glory and honour to God alone.

You see, the one alone who saves is God. And the story of God's grace in anyone's life should always result in grateful and joyful praise to God.

Very quickly, let's look at this verse. Now to the king of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be glory, honour, and glory forever and ever.

Amen. Here Paul erupts into this great celebration to the king of ages. That is to the king who's upon his throne and nothing will ever take him off it.

[30 : 11] The God who's no beginning and no end. The God who reigns and the God who rules. To him belongs the praise. He says to the God who's immortal, the God who cannot die, the God who cannot change.

Then he says, the God who's invisible, because God is a spirit, but in Christ the invisible is made visible. He is the exact representation of his being.

Jesus said, if you've seen me, then you've seen the Father. This is the one that Paul praises. To the only God, because finally he understands that there is only one true God and it's God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And he says, be glory and honor forever and ever. Not that he could add any glory to the God who's infinitely glory, but that he could ascribe blessing and praise to him for what he'd done in his life.

If you've been saved by grace, you've caused to celebrate. You've caused to rejoice. If you've got proper vision of Christ and if you're confident in the gospel, this will be the practical outworking of it in your life.

[31 : 31] That you will embrace Christ, that you will cherish Christ, that you will celebrate Christ, and that you will share it with others. You know, when I said at the beginning about my friend Ewan in Edinburgh, that every time I hung out with him, it was like being in the presence of Jesus.

Do you know why that is? Because Ewan was a man who was able to see that no one was beyond the pale of the gospel. Ewan was a man who was able to deliberately position himself next to those who some of us deem as sinners.

Ewan was a man who was confident that in Christ and in his gospel that it was the power of God unto salvation for those who believe. I wonder, is your confidence in Christ and in this gospel, will anyone ever describe you as being someone who it feels like being in the presence of Jesus?

Paul's living proof to Christ's great forgiveness. Paul's living proof to Christ's greatness. Paul is living proof to the greatness of our gospel.

And brothers and sisters, tomorrow, we have an opportunity to celebrate this gospel. We have an opportunity, not based on anything on our own and not based on any confidence in ourselves, but based solely upon Jesus Christ and him alone to suck with him at his table.

[33 : 05] It is a scandal of grace that Jesus Christ invites sinners to partake with him in his feast. So if you've never professed faith publicly, then you need to look to Christ.

You need to abandon yourself. You need to deny self. You need to cast all that you are and all that you know about yourself on his grace and his sufficiency.

Are there refuge? Have we none. But we hang our hope in Christ alone. You know the amazing thing is, it's not about how great our faith is.

It's not even about how small our faith is. It's about who our faith is in. The object of our faith. Great faith doesn't save.

Weak faith does not condemn. Your faith may be as small as a mustard seed. But if it is directed to Jesus Christ, then you will be saved and you have cause to celebrate and to join with him at his table.

[34 : 17] Let us pray. Our gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the wonder and for the glory of the Gospel.

We thank you for the greatness of our Saviour. We thank you that he alone can save. We thank you that he came into this world to save sinners of which we are the worst. Father, this morning we would say that to you belongs praise.

You, the King Eternal. You, the Immortal One. You, the Invisible One made visible in Christ. You, the only God, belongs glory, honour and praise now and forevermore.

And so we would bow our heads and we would worship you. We would ask that this morning that you would increase our confidence in the Gospel. That Father, if the grace of God has grown stale in our lives, that you would awaken us and you would refresh us to see that no one is beyond the pale of the Gospel, that no one is unreachable or unredeemable, but you're the God of perfect patience, seeking to lead all those who would believe.

To repentance in yourself. Father, we pray that you would draw anyone here this morning by your irresistible grace, that they would hear your voice calling to them to come, to come and put their faith in you, to forsake all and trust in you, that they may have you as Lord and Saviour.

[35 : 35] Father, for those of us who know you and love you, may this weekend be a time of refreshing and may this weekend be a time where our confidence is increased in Christ and his Gospel, that we may go from this place and into this world to tell all that there is a Saviour who saves sinners, even the worst, and that there is a place for them at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

So, Father, bless us now for Christ's sake. Amen. We're going to conclude our worship and we're going to sing in Psalm 145. I'll thee extol my God, O King.

I'll bless thy name always. May will I bless each day and will thy name forever praise. It's on page 442, Psalm 145, the first version.

Great is the Lord and much to be praised. His greatness's search exceeds. Race unto race shall praise thy works and show thy mighty deeds. Let's sing verses 1 to 6 to God's praise.

I'll thee extol my God, O King. I'll bless thy name always.

[36 : 54] He will thy blessing, He will thy name forever praise.

Great is the Lord much to thee praise. His greatness's search exceeds.

His greatness's search exceeds. His greatness's search exceeds. With sum to it, child, grace thy works, I'm sure thy mighty deeds.

my heart, my heart, my heart, thy glorious majesty, the honor will report.

I'll speak of all thy mighty words, which wonders are, O Lord.

[38 : 15] men, men, men, hope, thy nachts, the might shall show, thy nachts, thy nachts, the dreadful life.

and thy glory to heaven. Thy greatness will declare.

Amen. And with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all this day, now and forevermore.

Amen.