

AM Matthew 1:18-25 & 1 Timothy 1:12-17 A Faithful Saying

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[0 : 00] Verses 18 to 25. Matthew 1 verse 18.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

[1 : 14] Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus.

And now we turn over to our second reading in 1 Timothy, chapter 1, and verses 12 to 17.

Paul says, I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.

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

[2 : 42] 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.

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

To the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen. Let's bow together in prayer. Heavenly Father, we would indeed give glory and honor to you for all your majesty, for all your sovereign power.

we thank you that you are the great creator God. We thank you that you rule over all things. But we thank you at this time especially that you have sent your son, Christ Jesus, into the world to save sinners.

[4 : 09] We pray that each one of us here might know that salvation in all of its fullness, that the light of the world may shine in our hearts and may radiate out from us, that we may have hope and peace and joy.

Grant to us that, few though we are, we may faithfully represent you in this town of Dumfries and in the surrounding areas.

All around us are the multitudes who stand in such need. Lord, so many who are acting still in ignorance and unbelief, perhaps not going to the extremes that Paul had, and yet still breaking your law and walking in their own ways and not in the ways of God and heading for judgment.

Help us that we may speak of the Lord Jesus to them. We pray for this world around us in all of its present troubles.

Lord, we see all around us wars and civil unrest and crime and terrible shootings and people being shot dead in the streets.

[5 : 45] Lord, we thank you that such things have not directly touched us here, and yet we know there are many around the world who are living in the midst of them today, including many of your own people, and some of them persecuted for their faith.

Look with kindness and mercy, we pray, particularly on your people to preserve them and keep them faithful in the midst of trouble. But also look with mercy upon this world to rescue the world from itself, as it were, from its own sin, Lord, we pray for our own families and loved ones, commit them to you.

We pray for the children that they may grow up to know and love the Lord Jesus. We pray, Lord, for family members who are yet unsaved that you will touch their hearts even this Christmas time.

We know that in this country almost everyone will think about Christmas. Lord, help them to see beyond the stable, to see the meaning of it all.

We pray, Heavenly Father, for those who are unwell. Once again, we commit Margaret to you. We pray, Lord, for others who may be struggling in different ways, for some who may be struggling with loneliness or with anxiety, Lord, grant to us that we may know that the Lord, our God, is the one who heals, the one who makes alive, the one who is able to comfort and bless those who are downtrodden and suffering.

[7 : 44] Draw near to us now as we look into your word and speak to us through it, we pray, for we ask it in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.

Amen. How appropriate that we're singing about calves on a day when a calf is being born over at the farm.

Thankfully, that calf will never have to be sacrificed nor any other now. because the true sacrifice has come. Let's turn now to 1 Timothy chapter 1 and 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.

Well, today is, of course, Christmas Day. All over the world, preachers will be talking about the birth of Christ.

[9 : 12] It's a wonderful story and there are many good and helpful things that can and will be said. But the most important thing is surely why.

Why did he come? if King Charles were to walk through that door right now and walk down to the front and sit quietly in our service, I'm sure you'd be wondering why.

Why? Why has he come? You wouldn't be content just to take a photo on your mobile phone and to tell people afterwards we had a big surprise, the king came to our church.

You'd want to know why. Why has he come to a little church in a small Scottish town? What's he come for?

Years ago, believe it or not, I was mistaken for Prince Charles, as he then was. Hard to imagine, I know. When I was younger and slimmer and didn't have a beard, I did bear a passing resemblance to Prince Charles.

[10 : 40] And one day I went to a meeting in the Free Presbyterian Church in London, and a lady came running over to me wanting my autograph. And as she got closer, she suddenly stopped, embarrassed, and said, I'm so sorry.

I thought you were Prince Charles. Well, what if it had been Prince Charles? Would she have been content with just an autograph?

She'd want to know why, wouldn't she? Wouldn't that be rather odd for him to be visiting the Free Presbyterian Church in London, unannounced?

wouldn't it be rather odd for him to be there in just an ordinary suit, with no court attendants, no royal robes? Would be a very strange thing to happen.

Surely she would want to know why. Well, likewise with the birth of Christ. If you'd been in Bethlehem that day and the shepherds had come rushing up to you and said, the Son of God is in that stable, I'm sure you wouldn't just shrug your shoulders and say, oh, that's nice.

[12 : 06] You'd wonder why. What's the Son of God doing? Visiting a little town in the Judean hills. And what's he doing coming as an ordinary baby?

lying in a manger? And why is he alone? He's the king of angels. Okay, the angels were out there in the fields praising God.

Why aren't they with him in the stable? I know in nativity plays they all end up together, don't they? But in the Bible there's no hint that there were any angels standing around the manger.

It's all quite extraordinary. there must be a reason. And of course there is a reason. And our text tells us the reason.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And it's not the only text that says that.

[13:13] We read another of them in Matthew 1. You shall call his name Jesus because he shall save his people from their sins.

And there are many other such texts in the New Testament and indeed in the Old as well. This was after all the best prepared event in history.

Planned along with everything that followed. The life and the death and the resurrection of Christ before the foundation of the world. And we'd expect that preparation, wouldn't we, for such a big event.

if the king really had come here to Dumfries Free Church today, I'm sure it wouldn't have been a spur of the moment decision.

We would have received a letter beforehand to tell us he was coming and why he was coming and what we were expected to do when he came. And so it is with the birth of Christ.

[14:27] God had been promising this visit for thousands of years, right from the beginning in Genesis 3. In our reading we had mention of a prophecy 700 years before in Isaiah.

In our psalm we had a prophecy of it a thousand years before in the Psalms of David. Anyone who had read the Old Testament and the Jews did read it every Sabbath, they knew he would come. and though they didn't know when, they should have known why. Paul certainly knew why.

Let's look at Paul's explanation. And I want to consider this text under four headings. A saying to rely on, the sinners who needed saving, the salvation we have in Christ, and the supreme example in Paul.

So first, a saying to rely on. This saying is trustworthy, Paul says, and deserving of full acceptance.

[15:51] the authorised version translates it a faithful saying. There are five of these faithful or trustworthy sayings in the three pastoral epistles as they're called, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.

Apart from this one, there's a saying about ministry in 1 Timothy 3, a saying about godliness in 1 Timothy 4, a saying about faithfulness in 2 Timothy and a saying about grace in Titus 3.

You can look them up later if you wish. They'll be a great blessing to you. Pastoral letters were written to encourage Timothy and Titus in the work that they were doing and to tell them what they should do and teach.

And these sayings were some of the key doctrines that they were to uphold. They were sayings that were well known. Some of them may have been part of an early creed.

But the point is that they were trustworthy. They were sayings you could rely on. We live in a world today where you can't always rely on what people say.

[17:17] even people in authority. Even in the news there's so much propaganda. So much spin. You have to double check everything.

Especially in spiritual matters. There is so much confusion. So much error. But these five faithful sayings you can rely on.

They are 100% true. They are the word of God. And none is more important than this one about Christ.

This is worthy, Paul says, of full acceptance. You can accept every word of it and you can accept it wholeheartedly. Indeed, you can stake your life and eternity upon it.

So what does it say? Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Let's begin at the end of that sentence with the sinners who needed saving.

[18:31] Some might think that that is a gloomy subject for Christmas Day. But unless we see the problem, we can't appreciate the answer. Without sin, Christmas Day actually has no meaning.

Remember what the angel said to Joseph? He shall save his people from their sins. Who are these sinners who needed saving?

sin? Well, of course, it's us. Every one of us. According to the Bible, we are all guilty of sin.

Romans 3, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And that is a serious problem.

sin brings us under the judgment of God. It ruins our lives. And it ruins the lives of everyone else around us.

[19:39] And it's not just the big sins that are the problem. Sin is any breach of the law, great or small. Murder, adultery, theft, these are the big sins.

And we can quite understand why they would get us into trouble with God and why they would cause trouble in the world. But lying and covetousness and pride and lust, these are all sins as well. And it's not just the things that we do wrong, but the things that we fail to do right. Sins of omission as well as sins of commission.

Remember the sheep and the goats. The goats were judged not for harming those in need, but for not helping them.

By this standard we are all sinners. Paul says in Romans, there is none righteous. No, not one.

[20 : 48] Indeed, we're sinners twice over. first as children of Adam, and secondly in our own right. When Adam fell, the whole human race fell with him.

And we are all guilty in Adam from the moment we are born. But we've also inherited Adam's sinful nature, and we've committed countless sins of our own, so that we have no excuse before God. No excuse and no remedy. Good works can't counterbalance our sins. Religious rituals can't save us.

Any amount of tears of repentance can't wash away our sins. We cannot save ourselves. So what can be done about it?

Let's come now to our second point. The heart of the matter here, the salvation we have in Christ. Christ, Jesus, came into the world to save sinners.

[22 : 08] That was the main purpose of his coming. Yes, he did other things as well. He showed us the character of God. He taught us the ways of God. But above all, he brings us back to God.

That's why he came. He says so himself. Luke 19, the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.

Now that salvation was not accomplished at Bethlehem. but at Calvary. Christ had to die for our sins.

But Bethlehem had to come first. He had to be born in order to die. And therefore, Paul says, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Christ. That combined title and name, Christ Jesus, sums up his mission. Christ is the Greek form of the Hebrew Messiah, means the anointed one.

[23 : 20] He's our anointed prophet, priest, and king. He's been anointed as the saviour of the world. Jesus was the Greek form of the Hebrew Yeshua, which means the Lord will save.

That was his mission. And to accomplish that mission, he came into the world. As the carol puts it, he came down to earth from heaven, who was God and Lord of all.

salvation couldn't be accomplished by remote control from heaven. There was no question of Christ working from home.

He had to come into this world to save us. And he had to actually become man, fully man.

It wasn't enough for him just to visit the world. He had to take on human nature and live amongst us. I asked earlier, what if the king had come to visit our church?

[24 : 35] Perhaps to make the analogy a little bit closer, I should have said, what if the king came to live here in Dumfries? That's what Jesus did.

The word became flesh and dwelt among us. Now that in itself was a considerable sacrifice. Paul says in Philippians 2, he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men.

To Corinthians 8, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor. And that poverty was evident even at Bethlehem, being born in a manger because there was no room for him in the inn. But that, of course, was only the start. He couldn't save us just by living amongst us. He had to die on the cross.

Paul goes on in Philippians, he humbled himself to the death of the cross. Christ died at Calvary as a sacrifice for sin, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[25 : 52] He died the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. He suffered the judgment of God upon him so that we might be forgiven and receive the blessing of God.

Peter says, he himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. Nothing less than that would do.

If an easier way had been possible, then God would have chosen it. Why inflict suffering on his son unless it was strictly necessary? But it was necessary.

Without shedding of blood, there is no remission. Christ shed his precious blood for us. Now this whole process from Bethlehem to Calvary was an amazing act of love.

Christ was under no obligation to save us, and we certainly didn't deserve to be saved. But at infinite cost, Christ chose to save us.

[27 : 12] Paul says in Romans 5, God shows his love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. In another of those faithful sayings, Titus 3, he says, when the goodness and loving kindness of God appeared, he saved us.

Christ Jesus then came into the world to save sinners. and of course he succeeded. Down through the ages, thousands of sinners have found salvation in Christ.

And in heaven there will be a multitude no man can number, of every kindred, tribe and tongue, washed in the blood of the Lamb, ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, saved by the grace of God, filled by the Spirit of God.

Mission accomplished. That is why he came. But finally, the supreme example, Paul himself.

Christ Jesus came to save sinners, Paul says, of whom I am foremost. Paul is amazed at his own salvation, and even more amazed that God has entrusted him with the preaching of the gospel.

[28 : 43] He looks back at his past in verse 13, and he admits the ugly truth about himself.

Formerly, I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and an insolent opponent.

Well, that's true, isn't it? we first meet with Paul in Acts 7, when he was still called Saul. Those who stoned Stephen laid down their garments at the feet of a young man called Saul, and we're told he approved of his execution.

Great persecution arose at that time, and Saul was at the heart of it. in Acts 9, we read of him breathing out threats and slaughter.

He was actually on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians when he met with the Lord. People have died because of Saul.

He admits as much in Acts 26, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. No wonder Ananias was reluctant to go to Saul when the Lord asked him to.

[30 : 11] No wonder the church in Jerusalem was reluctant to receive him. But that day on the road to Damascus, he was saved. I received mercy, he says, the mercy he hadn't shown to others.

when he says that he did it in ignorance, that is not an excuse. That's simply an explanation. He could say with the psalmist, I was brutish and ignorant.

I was like a beast towards you. But that was before his conversion. Afterwards, he was a different man, and the Lord had called him to be an apostle.

Now, Paul sees his own conversion as an example, to encourage others. 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 to eternal life.

And he breaks forth in praise to the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.

[31 : 33] The point is, if Paul could be saved, anyone can. There is no limit to the grace of God.

All of us, when we look at ourselves, will have to admit that we're sinners. Some, perhaps, have committed terrible sins.

Indeed, there's been quite a competition down through the years for that title, Chief of Sinners. John Bunyan's autobiography was entitled, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners.

But whatever sins you have committed, there is salvation for you, if you will only trust in Jesus Christ. So what does all this mean for us?

Well, if you're not yet a Christian, the message is, come to Christ. He's able to save even you. It says in Hebrews, he's able to save to the uttermost those who come to him in faith.

[32 : 45] Jesus says, whoever comes to me, I will in no wise cast out. Maybe you're hesitating because of your sins. You're a nice person outwardly, but inwardly you know that you're full of pride, and anger, and hypocrisy, and hatred, and arrogance.

How can God save you? Well, the answer is here in this text. Christ Jesus came for that purpose, to save sinners, just like you.

is there any sin that the blood of Christ can't cover? Scripture says the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin.

Maybe you've rejected the gospel many times before. That too can be forgiven. You've not yet sunk to the same depths as Paul.

And even if you had, God can lift you up from there. whoever you are, whatever you've done, Christ can save you. That is why he came.

[33 : 56] But if you are already a Christian, like Paul, if you have received mercy, if you have been saved, praise God for it, like Paul.

And seek like Paul to serve him in whatever way he calls you. and pray for others. You know, sometimes we despair of some people ever being saved, because they seem so entrenched in sin, so hardened against the gospel.

But is there anyone Christ can't save? You would have looked at Saul persecuting Christians, and you might have thought, no hope for him.

But there was. Look back at your own experience. You may have seemed beyond hope. I know I did.

But if there was hope for Paul, if there was hope for you and me, then there is hope for our family, and our friends, and our neighbours.

[35 : 11] Christ Jesus, came into the world to save sinners. May he save many in our day. Amen. Let's conclude our service with the evening.

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