

# PM 1 Timothy 1:12-17 A Faithful Saying

*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: 23 July 2023

Preacher: Rev Jonathan Watson

[ 0 : 00 ] Chapter 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope. To Timothy, my true child in the faith, grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

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, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

Now we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully. Understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

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.

[ 2 : 15 ] 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.

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 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. This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience, by rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

[ 3 : 44 ] Amen. Let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank... Please turn with me then in your Bibles to 1 Timothy, and chapter 1.

And this evening I want to draw your attention to the memorable words of the Apostle Paul in his first letter, verses 12 to 17 in particular of 1 Timothy, chapter 1.

And you notice at the outset that these words are autobiographical in nature. He's telling us something about himself.

And when you look at them, you could say, they tell us something about what Paul was. verse 13, he says, formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.

But as we read through these verses, we also see how they explain to us how Paul received mercy from God.

[ 5 : 09 ] Look at verse 13, he says, but I received mercy, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

And again, you notice in verse 16 that he repeats that earlier phrase. He says, but I received mercy. And then in the third place, Paul tells us why God had mercy on him.

Again, if you look at verse 13, he says, but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief. And then a little further on, he mentions a second reason why God showed him mercy. Verse 16, he says, 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 on him or in him for eternal life.

So they show us what Paul was. They explain to us how Paul received mercy. And they tell us why God had mercy on Paul.

[ 6 : 31 ] Now, although these words are autobiographical in nature, they are not all about Paul. For I want you to notice how this passage is framed by two, if you like, words of praise.

The passage begins with thanksgiving. In verse 12, he says, I thank him who has given me strength, appointing me to his service.

And then the passage closes, it's drawn to a close with these wonderful words of doxology, or words that give glory to God.

In verse 17, to the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen. So, although Paul is speaking about himself and what he experienced, his mind and his heart is full of Christ and he wants his testimony to exalt and to magnify the Lord in our eyes.

[ 7 : 47 ] And in particular, he wants his readers and all who hear this passage of scripture proclaimed from the pulpit, he wants them to look to his merciful and gracious saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, who is worthy of all honor and glory, world without end.

So, this passage is really about Jesus Christ, not Paul, even though it's autobiographical. It's about Jesus Christ.

So, let us consider this passage and what it has to say to us. And we'll consider, first of all, what Paul was.

And he tells us in verse 13, using three terms. He says he was a blasphemer, he was a persecutor, and he was an insolent opponent.

Paul was a blasphemer. He blasphemed Jesus Christ. He spoke evil of him.

[ 9 : 01 ] He denied the deity of Jesus Christ, his claim to be the Son of God. He denied the truth that Jesus Christ was the Christ, the Anointed One, that is, the prophet whom God said through Moses would be raised up, that all must hearken to.

And if anyone does not hearken, listen, pay attention to this prophet whom God would raise up like Moses, he would be cut off from his people. Paul denied that.

Jesus is not that prophet whom God would raise up like unto Moses. Jesus Christ was the priest with the everlasting priesthood, the priest according to the order of Melchizedek, who offered one sacrifice for sin for all time.

And he also denied that Jesus was the Christ, the King, that great exalted King whom David spoke about in many places in the Psalms, the one to whom the Lord said, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet, the King, the exalted King who was promised by God the nations as his inheritance and the ends of the earth as his possession.

Paul rejected all that. He denied that Jesus was the Christ. Instead, Jesus of Nazareth was an imposter.

[ 10 : 43 ] He was a false teacher. He was a wicked deceiver of the people. And it is really a blasphemous thing to hold these positions that we've just outlined that Paul in his days as Saul of Tarsus held to.

He was a blasphemer. But he was not just a blasphemer. He was a persecutor. He persecuted the church. And it really is quite astonishing to read in the light of this passage in 1 Timothy chapter 1 those references in the Acts of the Apostles where Paul's conversion is recorded for us.

Three occasions and it's significant in the Bible where you have repetition. the repetition is there for emphasis and in the Acts of the Apostles on three separate occasions Paul's conversion is outlined. It's first told us in chapter 9 and then it is repeated by Paul himself when he gave a defense of his life before the authorities in Acts chapter 22 and in Acts chapter 26.

I want to read some of these verses just to pick out the nature of his opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ and to Christ's church especially as it relates to this term I was formerly a persecutor and if you turn over to Acts chapter 9 and read the first three verses these verses come straight after the stoning of Stephen the first Christian martyr and you remember how Luke records the men who

executed Stephen laid their coats their cloaks at the feet of the young man Saul who gave approval to Stephen's execution and following that event it says that Paul still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus so that if he found any belonging to the way men or women he might bring them bound to Jerusalem and then if you turn over to Acts chapter 22 and verses 3 to 5 you have [ 13 : 31 ] Paul's own words of remembering what he once was and what he once did and he says in 22 verses 3 to 5 I am a Jew born in Tarsus in Cilicia but brought up in this city educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers being zealous for God as all of you are this day I persecuted this way to the death binding and delivering to prison both men and women as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness from them from them I received letters to the brothers and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished and then flick over a couple of more chapters to

Acts chapter 26 and take up the testimony of Paul in verse 9 of that chapter he says 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 in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities a blasphemer and a persecutor and he also says here in 1st Timothy 1 that he was an insolent opponent and this insolence or hubris pride or arrogance is what lay behind his blasphemy of Jesus Christ and of his persecuting of the church of Jesus Christ here was a man who in his own words found pleasure and satisfaction in insulting and humiliating other people so that is the kind of man the apostle Paul was I formerly was a blasphemer a persecutor an insolent arrogant opponent and yet this man tells us that he received mercy and how did he receive mercy well look at what he says here in verses 13 and verses 16 twice in this passage we read these words but I received mercy now humanly speaking you would have to say there was no hope for a man like

Saul of Tarsus he was beyond the pale as we say and no one in their wildest dreams imagined that Saul of Tarsus would ever become a Christian and you remember from the Acts of the Apostles in chapter 9 the story of his conversion on the road to Damascus not long after his conversion when he went to Jerusalem and tried to join the church it's significant isn't it that no one with perhaps the exception of Barnabas believed that Saul was a real convert they just had no room in their minds for the possibility that Saul could ever become a Christian he was such a wicked man can the leopard change his spots they perhaps asked one another oh I don't think so but I received mercy he says I received mercy and you notice in verse 14 to mercy Paul adds grace grace and he says the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus isn't that a beautiful picture grace overflowing grace abounding but the picture is one of a river in spate after a period of heavy rain you know all about this don't you in Dumfries doesn't the river sometimes burst its banks and floods the surrounding area that's the picture except here's the wonderful difference this river of grace when it overflows its banks when it cannot be contained within its banks as it were and carries everything away before it it doesn't lead to destruction it doesn't lead to devastation instead it leads to blessing to blessing grace flooded with faith a heart that was previously filled with unbelief and grace flooded with love a heart previously polluted by hatred grace abounded [ 20 : 04 ] John Bunyan you may know wrote his autobiography extolling the grace of God and he chose words for the title of his book from this passage in scripture he called it grace abounding to the chief of sinners and that was true not only of John Bunyan it was true of the apostle Paul and as the apostle reflects on God's mercy and grace and the faith and the love which he had experienced in the Lord Jesus Christ he writes down one of the greatest summary statements of the gospel to be found in the whole of the New Testament scriptures this is the first of five faithful sayings or trustworthy sayings which are found in 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus the so called pastoral epistles let's look for a few moments at this trustworthy saying a little bit more closely because it can teach us so much about the gospel this saying the saying he says is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ

Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost in the first place this saying teaches us that the content of the gospel is true and worthy of your trust this is what Paul words indicate he says what I'm about to say is the truth and what I'm about to say is worthy of your trust

what do you want to say Paul I want to repeat this glorious truth Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners what a contrast Paul's message is to the so called message and teaching of those false teachers at Ephesus whom he encouraged

Timothy to silence these false teachers of the law were dealing not in truth and fact and historical events but they were devoting themselves he says in verse 4 to myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith Paul isn't dealing with myth he's not dealing with endless genealogies and stories from the past that may or may not be true that lead to dissensions and speculations he's dealing with historical fact

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners this is the truth and it is absolutely trustworthy and then in the second place this simple statement of the gospel teaches us that the offer of the gospel ought to be accepted by all who hear it it is a trustworthy saying and it is deserving of full acceptance now what does that mean deserving of full acceptance well there are two possibilities full acceptance deserving of full acceptance can mean it deserves total complete and unreserved acceptance it is a saying that merits being fully and totally and unhesitatingly received accepted and believed but it can also mean this is a saying that deserves to be accepted worldwide universally in other words here is a trustworthy saying that ought to be accepted by all who hear it and I think both shades of the meaning are true the trustworthy saying deserves my full acceptance without reservation the trustworthy saying deserves everyone's full acceptance it is a message not only for the individual it is a message for all for this is the only saviour of the world

Jesus Christ there is no other saviour there is one mediator between God and men the man Christ Jesus there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners it is true it is trustworthy it deserves your full acceptance without reservation and that applies to each and every one of us without exception and then in the third place this faithful saying teaches us what really lies at the heart of the gospel if you want the gospel boiled down to its pure essence it is this Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners what a contrast the gospel is to the law the law what does it do it exposes our sin it sets a standard and we realize we do not meet that standard it draws a line in the sand a red line we cross that line we have transgressed the law either way we understand by the law what sin is what our sin is we are exposed by the law as sinners it gives us a knowledge of our sin and it leaves us guilty and condemned for our sin it cannot save us the law leaves us powerless to save ourselves but the gospel tells us of one who came to save us to save us sinners it tells us of a person

[ 27 : 56 ] Jesus Christ who can who will and who does save sinners and what a person he is Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners how many glorious truths are bound up in that very simple statement at the very least the statement causes us to think about his incarnation he came into the world he came into the world God appeared was manifest in the flesh what a wonderful glorious truth the incarnation of the son of God is he came into the world that that conveys the whole of the

Christmas message doesn't it the statement also causes us to think about his atoning work on the cross Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and his death on the cross was the capstone of all his saving work but the phrase also clearly implies his pre-existence he came into the world and we ask from where did he come and who is he anyway the eternal word the son of God who is he in yonder stall at whose feet the shepherds fall tis the Lord oh wondrous story tis the Lord the king of glory at his feet we humbly fall crown him crown him Lord of all Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and then the fourth thing it teaches us is that the gospel must be applied personally yes the gospel is to be offered to all which is what we love to do happy if with my latest breath I may but gasp his name preach him to all and cry in death behold behold the lamb but my friends the gospel will never save you the gospel will never do your soul saving good unless it is applied personally to you and surely this is what we see from Paul's words in verse 15 where he says

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am foremost this is the gospel that saved me that saved me that was personally applied to me the chief the foremost of sinners only this Christ Jesus could save me the foremost of sinners it is fascinating to trace Paul's self identification in his letters there's a phrase that's topical today isn't it self identification first Corinthians 15 verse 9 he speaks of himself as the least of the apostles the least of the apostles but then in Ephesians 3 verse 8 he confesses that he is the very least of all the saints let alone the apostles of all Christians he's the very least of all Christians and then in 1st Timothy 1 15 he's at the

very lowest rung of the ladder of sinners the foremost am I that's how it's written in the original the emphasis on the I right at the very end of the sentence of sinners the foremost am I and I want you to notice before we leave this point the tense of the verb he uses he doesn't say [ 33 : 17 ] I was the chief of sinners he says I am the chief of sinners my friend is that something that you can say are you a sinner and when you stand before God and are open before him whose eyes see everything do you feel experientially that you are the only sinner as it were in this whole wide world I'm reminded of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector which is told in Luke's gospel and chapter 18

I'm sure you're very familiar with it but it's worth turning to and letting these words sink in to us and feel the weight of a point that the Lord Jesus Christ is seeking to make he also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt he says two men went up to the temple to pray one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector the Pharisee standing by himself prayed thus God I thank you that I am not like other men extortioners unjust adulterers or even like this tax collector I fast twice a week I give tithes of all that I get but the tax collector standing afar off would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his breast saying God be merciful to me now our version says a sinner but the original has the definite article God be merciful to me the sinner and Jesus says I tell you this man the tax collector who thought himself the only sinner in the world when he stood before God I tell you this man went down to his house justified which means freely forgiven and declared righteous in the sight of God rather than the other for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted the Pharisee stood before God and compared himself with other people and thought he was righteous the tax collector stood before

God and he didn't compare himself with anybody else before God he knew what he was a sinner the sinner who needed God to be propitious towards him to turn away his wrath by taking away his sin God be merciful to me the sinner psychologically it's the same thing that Paul expresses in 1st Timothy chapter 1 verse 15 Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost but like the tax collector in the Lord's parable I received mercy mercy that mercy is available for sinners here this evening that's the gospel if the trumpet sounded and the voice of the archangel was heard and the dead in

Christ started to rise from their graves and we who know the Lord are caught up to meet him in the air then I'd have to withdraw those words and I'd have to say that mercy is no longer available but that day has not yet come this is the day of grace mercy today is the accepted time today is the day of salvation come to the one who alone can show you this kind of mercy even though you consider yourself to be of sinners the foremost and that brings us quickly to the last point why God had mercy on Paul and two reasons are mentioned in the text the first one is found in verse 13 and the word because alerts us to it he says in verse 13 but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief and I think Paul is referring to the distinction under the

[ 39 : 24 ] Old Testament law of sins of ignorance or unintentional sins and high handed sins Paul as we read in those accounts of his conversion believed he was doing God a service by persecuting the people of the way he was in his own mind serving God zealously as did his forefathers he thought he was like Levi in the Old Testament rounding up and putting to death those who were defying the law of God but he was acting in ignorance and unbelief and I think that's what he means here when he says but I was shown mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief when his eyes were opened on the

Damascus road or actually when they were closed because of the brightness of the light that shone upon him he knew the truth Saul Saul why are you persecuting me who are you Lord it is Jesus I am Jesus whom you are persecuting and you remember how when the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified one of the first words from the cross he uttered was father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing and that prayer was answered in many ways not least in the mercy that was later to be shown to Saul the blasphemer persecutor and insolent opponent of Christ and his church who had acted ignorantly in unbelief and the second reason is found in verse 16 and Paul actually spells it out here in the clearest terms he says but I received mercy for this reason that in me as the foremost sinner

Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience his long suffering as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life isn't that beautiful and wonderful Paul is the prototype trophy of grace and in the gospel he is held up so that you can see what he was so that you can see that he

received mercy and so that you can understand why God showed him mercy so that you might have hope of mercy too I wonder does anyone here feel that you're a hopeless case beyond the pale perhaps you feel there's just that one sin oh if only you could turn the clock back but you can't and it's there and it's eating you up with regret and grief and sorrow and what's worse you think the Lord could never forgive me that

I'm a hopeless case my friend says Paul can you hear him speak to you through the word my friend don't despair Christ had mercy even on me of sinners the foremost the worst of sinners the greatest of sinners the chief of sinners and he can have mercy on you the saying is trustworthy and deserving a full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost but I receive mercy what a tragedy beyond words would it be for someone to be in the service this evening and to hear this message from

Paul's autobiographical words about his experience of God's grace through Jesus Christ and yet not to avail of the hope held out in this text of scripture oh that grace would overflow to you with the faith and the love that is in Christ Jesus may God bless his word to us let us pray our heavenly  
and for me your hope be in how are going here we have to