

Gratitude, Grief, Grace

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[0 : 00] For a short while, let's turn together to 1 Timothy chapter 1, which we read a few minutes ago. And I'd like us particularly to focus on verses 12 to 15, where Paul is writing to Timothy, whom, as we heard and read of here in this very chapter, was a servant of God, a gospel preacher in the city of Ephesus.

And Paul, in a sense, goes into an interlude within the doctrine and the exhortations that he is teaching Timothy. And the interlude is a very personal testimony of how he came to know the Lord Jesus Christ and the overflowing nature of God's grace in his own experience.

And I think that in our gospel ministry, wherever the word of God is proclaimed, this has to be emphasized more and more. I'm not saying that it hasn't been, but it must be continued to be emphasized, the overflowing nature of the grace of God.

Because the devil will make us believe that we're not good enough to be recipients of the grace of God. But that's not the gospel at all.

It's the very opposite. It is those who are in deepest need for whom the grace of God has been made known and is prepared.

[1 : 45] And God is ready to shout out his overflowing grace on those who are ready to receive it. Well, just a word of contextual introduction to this letter.

Paul wrote what are known as pastoral letters. He wrote two to Timothy and he wrote one to Titus as well. And this letter, as well as others, are very near, written at very near the end of Paul's life. As we heard this morning from our brother John McLean, he had come virtually to the end of the race. He had run the race.

He had fought the good fight of faith. But here he is going back, as it were, to the beginnings of things in his own experience of God's grace.

And although Paul here in the letter was trying to encourage Timothy in different ways, particularly because of the circumstances in which Timothy found himself, the gospel was being countered by false beliefs, as we find earlier on in the chapter where Paul speaks of doctrines that were contrary to the word of God.

[3 : 14] He says at the beginning of the chapter, as I urged you, I was going to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus, that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, and so on.

This is what Paul was exhorting Timothy to counter and to stand up for his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he uses, he goes into this, as it were, parenthesis, this interlude, just to remind Timothy of the goodness of God to him personally.

And this is something that God in his grace has given to us, recorded for us in scripture. We have also, of course, Paul's account of himself on the road to Damascus.

And he is in some respects alluding to that because of what he had been doing before. Paul wanted others to be made aware of what the gospel was about, and he wanted Timothy to be encouraged to show forth the praises of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 36] And he wanted others to be made aware of the gospel and the way in which it had impacted on himself. Now, there are many things we can extract from this short section in the first chapter of Timothy's first letter.

But I think there are three things, amongst other things, that I would like to draw our focus to as Paul testifies of his own experience.

And I'm going to borrow a page of alliteration from my brother John here by giving three topics, each beginning with G. So it's a three-point sermon, very free church, and each point begins with G,

just to help us remember these things.

Now, as I said, there are very many other things. The first point I would like to draw our attention to is gratitude.

The gratitude that Paul expresses. We find that in verse 12. I thank him. I thank him.

[5 : 52] These three simple words, they're profound. The second thing I want to look at is the word grief, although it's not in the text. This is what Paul was causing, not only to the cause of Christ, but also to the Lord himself.

Grief. Grief. And it's so different from the first point, but I'm taking them as they are, recorded in the scripture before us. And then, thirdly and finally, there is what is the most important thing of all, grace.

So there was gratitude to the Lord Jesus. There was the grief he caused to the church, to the Lord and himself. He was included in that grief because he was causing himself troubles and things.

And, of course, there is this almost indescribable word, grace. The grace he had received from the Lord, despite his opposition to the Christian church and the Christ of the church.

So there are two things we can keep in our background here. Those of us who have, we believe, come to know the Lord and profess him as our Savior, as we did today at his table, this is something for us always to reflect on where we were brought from in the past ourselves.

[7 : 21] The other side, or another side of this coin is this, that the abundance of the grace of God, in Paul's attitude, in spite of what he had done, is there for you, who are as yet a stranger to this grace.

Paul calls himself the chief of sinners, as it is in another translation. He calls himself here the foremost. In other words, he saw himself as the worst of all.

We'll come to a little about that later on. Well, I want us to look at the first point I mentioned, and that is this gratitude. There's one commentator. He said that every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ should have an attitude of gratitude.

I wonder if each and every one of us who profess Jesus as our Savior has this deeply rooted in our lives. He says, I thank him.

And he says, I thank him who has given me strength. He's very much aware of his own inability to do anything good or any effort of his own that would bring him into favor with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[8 : 46] Paul reminds the Romans, does he not, that it was while we were without strength that Christ died for us.

So this thankful attitude, this attitude of gratitude, shows us something of Paul's character at this stage of life. He had come on.

He had grown. He had come to see his own insignificance, although he was insignificant in terms of his stature under the hand of the Lord as the apostle, the chosen vessel to the Gentiles.

And now here he is exhorting a younger successor in Timothy. He begins this interlude, as I said, with this thanksgiving, a sincere sense of his awareness of the privileged position and the role that he had been given as an apostle.

Paul, in a very real sense, had been a failure, just as we saw Peter had been before the Lord reinstated him.

[10 : 00] Paul had been a failure before God met him on the road to Damascus. And no doubt he was conscious of many of his own shortcomings, even afterwards and during his service of the Lord.

His gratitude is specific. He gives thanks to someone for something. He gives thanks in the first place to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ Jesus, our Lord. Messiah Jesus, our Lord. The one who had been promised through the Old Testament prophets as the one who was coming to be the savior of God's people.

He gives thanks to him personally. And you know, sometimes we wonder if it's right for us to address Jesus in our prayers. Well, I think here we have an affirmative on that question.

Yes, it is. Jesus himself, yes, he taught us to pray, our Father in heaven. But that was during his days on the earth.

[11 : 09] It is not wrong for us, according to this, to thank him now. Because when we thank the Lord Jesus Christ, we thank God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the triune God who are inseparable and who are together forever.

We thank Jesus as the person who has called us out of darkness into his own marvelous light. So he thanks the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. And he's reminding Timothy of this. It's as though Paul is reminding all of us, every believer, no matter what role we have in the church, to be thankful to our savior.

And I believe that is what we're doing this morning around the Lord's Supper, which is otherwise known as a Eucharist, which in the original language means Thanksgiving, a Thanksgiving meal. It's what we had around the Lord's table this morning. An attitude of gratitude. And of course, where there is an attitude of gratitude, it displaces other things.

[12:30] And by nature, we need this attitude of gratitude to develop in our hearts and in our lives so that what is opposite to thankfulness, and we all know what that is, if we're not thankful at any level, then we're murmuring, we're complaining.

We're not content with what we have. We're not content with the situation we're in under God's hand.

We're either complaining about our providential situation, or we're complaining about someone. And perhaps, worse than anything, we're complaining to God, telling him that he has been unfair to us in some way, or that we don't deserve what we're getting under his hand, as though we had any right to question the potter as the clay.

We have no right to question the Lord as to how he deals with us. What we should have is a spirit of thanksgiving, and in that, there is contentment with the will of God.

Is this not what the Lord Jesus himself demonstrated? Your will be done. And that is how he taught his disciples to pray. Your will be done on earth.

[13:59] And writing, Paul says to Timothy himself, that godliness with contentment is great gain. I don't want to go over a tangent on this, but he was thanking the Lord.

And for what was he thanking? Because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service. It's as though Paul was saying, who was I that God should call me to be one of his disciples?

Who was I that I should have been chosen by him, and appointed as the apostle of the Gentiles?

And he says, he has given him strength.

Well, without him, we can do nothing. But we can do all things through him who strengthens us.

There is the strength.

We don't stop at, we can't do anything. Of ourselves, that is true. But we can do all things. And that is what Paul himself says in a victorious declaration of the risen power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15:12] He has given me strength. He has poured out his spirit into my heart, as Paul writes in Romans.

This gratitude is a characteristic, then, of every person who is bound to Christ, who has been brought from darkness into his own marvelous light.

And he can do that for whoever of us is feeling in darkness at this time, be it estranged from God. If you are an unconverted person, God can shine into your hearts with a liberality of his grace.

And that is what is behind this gratitude that Paul is expressing. He gave him strength, and he makes reference here to the enabling he has been given.

I'm sure those of us who are followers of the Lord down a number of years, very often we feel that we're going to give up on the way. But God gives us strength to carry on.

[16:28] And it was the same God of whom Paul was speaking to Timothy here, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, the Lord who suffered and died as we heard today, and who rose again, and who is able to lead his people through the wilderness until at last they are found in Zion's glory.

God in Christ met Paul and enabled him. This was the Damascus Road experience. And every time the word of God is proclaimed to each one of us, no matter who you are, be you a child of God or outside the fold of Christ, God in Christ and the Spirit is meeting you tonight.

He's speaking you through his word. And he's telling you about how one of his servants was saved by grace. And he is telling you how you also can be saved by that very same grace.

God in Christ met Paul and enabled him. So the question arises for each one of us, are we thankful? Are you a thankful person tonight?

Recognizing the power of Christ in your life. Recognizing the rescue work that God has carried out in and through him.

[17 : 59] Reaching down from heaven towards you and pulling you out of the snares of sin. Do you want to be, to recognize how to be thankful in this way?

Or are you a thankless person? Are you a complaining person? There are saints who complain, sadly, but that is when the devil is given a hand in our lives and we allow him to take hold of our weaknesses.

We ought not to be unthankful, but full of gratitude to God. The second point I want to bring to our attention is this background of Paul's which can be summarized in this one word which I've chosen, grief.

What a grievous practitioner of being against the Lord was Paul when he was Saul of Tarshish before his name was changed, before the light of the glory of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ shone into his heart.

And he, as it were, lists all the things that he was guilty of. In verse 13 we read formerly, ah, now things have changed, but this is how I was.

[19 : 34] This is how really bad I was. Formerly, I was a blasphemer. Taking God's name and misrepresenting it.

Taking God's name on our lips, but also in our lives and misrepresenting what the gospel is all about. I suppose blaspheming is emphasized more on the word spoken against what the gospel is. And that is what Paul was doing. He was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. A blasphemer, a persecutor, and insolent opponent of the Lord.

And though formerly he was like this, his past does not disqualify him entirely from being used by God.

And that is the wonder of God's grace as Paul tells it to us here. His past is not beyond God's grace.

[20 : 50] Formerly, there are people in our own day and age we hear of those of the Christian faith in foreign countries, and there is I think a current situation going on in Pakistan where a lady has been accused of blasphemous speech against Islam.

And it's an amazing thing that here we have one who is as far as we know a follower of the Lord with her husband and her family are under fear because of the persecution that they may be under. She was accused of blasphemy but I think that sentence was lifted from her and the people of the land are up in arms because the charge of blasphemy has been taken from her.

However, Paul here is talking about misrepresenting the Lord and his past is not beyond the grace of God.

His past was bad. There is no doubt about that. He makes no bones about that himself. His past was injurious. His past was harmful.

[22 : 13] His past was violent. He was a violent man in his opposition to the Lord's people going out under instructions and imprisoning the Lord's people for their faith.

But his past highlights for us the greatness of the grace of God. This gratitude is a wonderful thing. It's a something that we can't the gratitude of Paul in the light of the grief that he had caused the grace that is also ministered to him is beyond our comprehension.

He caused grief to Jesus and many faithful followers of the Lord. Here's a question. Are you causing grief to Jesus tonight because you are not for him?

Well, you must be either for him or against him. You can't sit on the fence. We heard that made quite clear to us today already. He caused grief to Jesus in a very negative way with this blasphemy and persecution of God's people.

[23 : 33] He says he acted ignorantly in unbelief. I wonder what that exactly entailed. did he not know what he was doing? You remember how the Lord Jesus from the cross one of the seven sayings from the cross he said father forgive them for they know not what they are doing.

Was that an excuse for not coming to the Lord because he didn't know what he was doing? What was happening was that there was so much zeal in his life in the wrong direction that he was oblivious to the offense that he was to the cross.

He was so on fire for Judaism that he lost sight of the true God of the Jewish nation and Judaism became his God under instructions from his fellow Pharisees and the leaders of the Jews.

It's very easy even for those of us who are the Lord's people to be so on fire for our religion and I hate using that word what we have to be on fire for his Christ not the church in itself not the denomination we belong to but for Christ and Christ alone.

That is what John Knox was it who wanted Scotland for Christ and Robert Murray McShane likewise Dundee for Christ.

[25 : 21] I did it ignorantly. One commentator writes this on that subject in this context. It doesn't in itself deserve pardon but it is a less culpable cause of unbelief than pride and willful hardening of oneself against the truth.

I wonder to what extent Paul actually did that hardening himself against the truth but he was blind and this is this ignorance that besets us by nature anyway.

I wonder to what extent our shorter catechism when it speaks about sin some sins in themselves are more heinous in the sight of God than others and yet at the same time although he says this I did it ignorantly he saw himself as the first and foremost of sinners couldn't be any worse than me he's saying here and we can only speak of ourselves in that sense I'm not sure whether this means that Paul was the worst of sinners whatever else is true it's not how much sin we are guilty of but that we sin at all because every sin needs the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse it no matter how large or small it is every sin no matter how small it is condemns us to hell and that's the solemn truth that we have regarding sin because it's a breach of the law of

God and a breach of the law of God the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord and this is where Paul is coming from here he is talking about having been blessed by God in spite of his blindness in spite of his denial of the truth in spite of all that he knew of Old Testament scripture not recognizing the prophecies that spoke about the blessed Messiah who was to come at God's appointed time to know the Bible we're privileged you know none of us here and I'm sure that we've all heard something from the Bible at some time none of us here can plead total ignorance of

God's word of the gospel of the invitations of the gospel of the entreating words of the Lord Jesus Christ to come to him for salvation God has revealed our need to us in the Bible and he's revealed to us how that need is fully met beyond all our imagination so knowing the Bible being familiar with the word of God puts us in an inexcusable place perhaps I could say that puts us in a place where our sin is more culpable than the sins of those in other parts of the world who have never heard the gospel so there's gratitude there's this grief but we're not going to stop on a dark note we're going to rise with the sun and the brightness of the morning light came into the apostle's experience where he says with this word at the end of verse in the middle of verse 13 though formerly

[29 : 33] I was a blasphemer and so on but I received mercy but I received mercy it's almost as though there's a triumphant note of joy in Paul's heart when he relates this to Timothy I received mercy and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that in Christ Jesus I received mercy he didn't earn it it came to him freely from God it as though God opened as we say the windows of heaven and outpoured and opened his eyes as we know from the narrative we have of his conversion and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me this word overflowed is something that we do need to emphasize with regard to the proclamation of the message of the gospel the gospel has been given to us that we might be saved but we have to not just stop it we have to be saved from something we have to be saved from the judgment of

God we have to be saved from the condemnation of God we have to be saved from the wrath of God and ultimately we have to be saved from being separate forever from God which is what hell is so so Paul so we have grace for the grace of our Lord overflowed for me for me of all people with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus the love of God was shed abroad into the heart of Paul and this is how God comes and he plants the seed, his own seed, the seed of himself. What is God in essence for us to receive?

God is love. It's not a soppy love. It's not a love that is the kind of love that is bandied about in our present secular society.

All is love. Just be lovely and everything will be fine. Just love each other and everything will be fine in a secular sense. That's what we hear and that exists even in a humanistic sphere.

But this love Paul knew was costly because he assigns it to and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

[32 : 29] Faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Earlier on he speaks of what he is telling to Paul in verse five of this chapter. And this in a sense is a summary of the gospel. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

We read elsewhere in scripture that without faith it is impossible to please God. To please God. And what God does when he comes with his grace with his overflowing grace in our lives is that he plants the fruit of the spirit in the life of the person whose heart he enters and thereby begins a good

work in their hearts.

and the first thing that he mentions there in verse five which Paul also mentions here in verse 14 is love.

The love of God is the love of God that has come into this world. God so much so loved the world that he gave. It is out of love that salvation has had its origin in God's heart if we can put it in these terms from before the beginning before time.

This love that came from God to man. It is this love that Paul is speaking of here. And faith and love are inseparable because they are all of the same spirit of God who comes and shows us his love for him as sinners deserving nothing from his hand and enables us by faith to embrace Jesus Christ as he is freely offered to us in the gospel.

[34 : 36] And there we have Paul's telling us he's given a personal testimony God's grace includes faith and love and the rest which we hear Peter speaking of growing he asks his readers to grow in grace and he asks believers in the Lord Jesus to add to their faith knowledge and to knowledge virtue and to virtue temperance or self control to temperance patience to patience godliness to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness love it's almost as though Peter there is using love as the one which encompasses all things where God in his love has outpoured this grace this abundant grace into the lives of those whom he blesses it is by

God's grace that Paul believes and loves and God's grace has come as we saw in enabling power through the work of the regenerating spirit it is God's spirit who brings God's grace God's abundant grace the love of Jesus to bear in Paul's life and the life of every Christian it is little wonder that we have from the pen of Paul so to speak the 13th chapter in the first letter of Corinthians speaking of what that change brings about in the hearts and lives of men and women and boys and girls who have been touched by the spirit of God and we have to ask ourselves look into the mirror of that chapter 1 Corinthians 13 and say am I growing in this way love suffers long and is kind love doesn't envy love is not pride it doesn't make anything of itself and of course parallel to that is what Paul speaks to the Philippians about in terms of the grace of the

Lord Jesus Christ speaking of the humility that the spirit of Christ ought to be engendering in the hearts of those who have come to know the nature of this grace it is God's spirit who does the work it is God's spirit who begins within us faith and a loving disposition to God and to others in verse 5 which I mentioned earlier on when Paul is speaking to Timothy here the aim of our charge is love it starts off with inner work of the spirit but that inner work creates an attitude that flows out and he's looking he's wanting Timothy to know there that the faith which has been engendered in his heart should show the love of God for him in a practical way as well as in a personal way for himself so it is God's spirit who begins within us the faith and a loving disposition to this saving

God does John not say in his letter he loved us we love because he first loved us God's grace then is an overflowing phenomenon it is not skimped it is not unwillingly given but freely offered in the preaching of the gospel and God will bring his own in but our responsibility is to preach Christ and him crucified and Paul was doing that as well I suppose the grace of love is not necessarily the forte of proclamation that Paul had but he brings love into the rest of all his writings in his letters and he speaks of that even in the letter to the Romans showing to us how the love of God is what wins people over and what the church has to show to a loveless world

God just to conclude Paul's own sinnership makes grace for him all the more wonderful and it's in as far very often as God shows us our total non deserving of any good thing from his hand and the more that grows in our lives the more we are aware of our non deserving of the least of the mercies of God then the more wonderful and enlarged will be the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ for us and also we will be enabled to bear his light for others to see this is not me we must say this is not about me and it's this is one way of helping us to speak a word in season to those who are in need if you are in need tonight ask one of the

[40 : 32] Lord's children how God came into their lives and you'll see from them you'll hear from them a testimony of the deep oh the deep deep love of Jesus this is what the gospel is all about so grace is super abundant for Paul God's grace creates thankfulness God's grace was highlighted by our by Paul's sinfulness and it is highlighted in our sinfulness and our constant need of God's forgiveness and grace and God's grace still saves God is still mighty to save God is still there for you with his arms outstretched not willing that any should be lost but that all should come to repentance oh it's our own guilt that will condemn us our own refusal of the grace of

God that will condemn us we don't deny the sovereignty of God and his salvation but your responsibility as is each and every one of us is to come to God and to heed the call of the gospel come to me and be saved look to me all you ends of the earth and be saved says Jesus for I am God and there is none else and we pray that for God's people desiring that others would see something of God's overflowing grace Paul he pled with the Corinthians to be reconciled to each other and to be reconciled to God and that is what we all need God has reconciled us to himself through the Lord Jesus Christ and herein indeed is grace that he who was rich became poor that we through his poverty might become rich
Amen let's pray