

A Sure Saying

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Preacher: Howard Dillon

[0 : 00] This is the AM service on the 11th of October 1998. The preacher is Howard Dillon.

His sermon is entitled A Sure Saying and is from 1 Timothy chapter 1 verses 12 to 17. Well, can I say first of all what a privilege it is for Aileen and I to come back to Doncaster and opportunity. I look at some of the faces I remember. You look old. Whereas we're still pristine, of course. But thank you, Paul, for the opportunity to come and to share with you this morning. Perhaps we'll begin by asking God to bless our work together.

Heavenly Father, we pray that you'll sow the seed of eternal life in our hearts. That whatever we learn in your holy word, we may indeed fulfill.

[1 : 13] Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. The text that I wanted to bring for our attention today comes from the first lesson that was read, 1 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 15.

The words are slightly different because I'm using the New International Version. The text says this, Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. Paul wrote this letter to Timothy to encourage him in the early stages of his new ministry at Ephesus.

Timothy had come up against some people who were intimidating and inflexible. In other words, so giving Timothy a hard time.

Never happened in the parish of Doncaster, but it did in Ephesus. And the older apostle seeks to tell Timothy that even the toughest opponent, the most irritating person, the most objectionable person, the most unlikely or unlikable character, can be actually turned around.

[2 : 47] 180 degrees by the convicting and conquering power of Christ. And what better illustration could Paul give of the power and love of Christ than his own story?

Paul's conversion was so dramatic that people could scarcely believe that it was true. Ananias was told to go to a particular house and minister to Saul of Carsus.

And if I might make Ananias' words Australian, he said, you have to be kidding. You have to be kidding.

I have heard by many about this man, how much evil he has done to all the saints. And so that was the common attitude to Saul of Carsus.

It was some plot, they thought, for him to get on the inside of the church and wreak the havoc there that he had done from outside. You'll recall that it took the personal assurance and guarantee of Barnabas before there was any acceptance of Paul at all.

[4 : 11] And it was some years before the church could say that he who persecuted us in times past now preaches the faith he once destroyed. Yes, Timothy, you'll never come across a harder case or for that matter a greater triumph that God can save Saul of Carsus.

He can save anyone you come against in Ephesus. Now the story of Paul is true in a sense because another story is true.

Here is a trustworthy saying. Here is a true story that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

And the trustworthy saying that I want to emphasize is the gospel story. The very heart of the gospel for good news is Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

I wonder if you've ever noticed how often that idea of the gospel story has been caught up in the hymns of the church. Tell me the stories of Jesus I love to hear.

[5 : 36] Remember that song from the Sunday school? Or tell me the old, old story of Jesus and his love. I will sing the wondrous story of the Christ who died for me.

Well, among all the stories that have come from all the gifted storytellers of the world this is the one that should be proclaimed far and wide it is the gospel story.

Now the gospel story is first of all a mystery story. Christ Jesus came into the world. If it was simply that Jesus came into the world it would not be a mystery story at all.

For there were many who bore the name of Jesus. A famous one was Jesus Barabbas. And on that first Good Friday Pilate asked the crowd which Jesus will you have?

Jesus Barabbas or Jesus Christ? What made it a mystery was the connection of the name Christ Christ?

[6 : 51] To Jesus. Christ Jesus came into the world. You see the name or title Christ means the anointed one the promised one God's Messiah.

In this person Jesus Christ the divine and the human meet. Truly human as truly divine and truly divine as truly human.

the God man appeared on earth came into the world. It's a mystery because it's beyond our kin. It's a mystery because it's beyond our comprehension. We would never have guessed at it if God had not revealed it as the truth. Christ Jesus came into the world.

so it's a mystery story. It's an adventure story. The God man came to save sinners. Jesus himself said the son of man has come to seek and to save those who are lost.

[8 : 01] And the gospel parables this morning emphasize the truth again. we can reverently think of Christ as he left his place in glory on that eternally planned errand of rescue.

He quite voluntarily embarks upon it though from time to time he speaks of his father sending him. The adventure story begins as he leaves glory and lives the life the Lord of glory mixing and mingling with sinful men and women.

The Lord of glory who is the friend of prostitutes and sinners rejects the sick the disabled who abused despised and poor.

That adventure story tells of he who loves his sheep knowing their danger hearing their cries following their tracks rescuing them and bringing them home.

The good shepherd not only risking his own life but in the end giving his own life for the sheep. It's an adventure story.

[9 : 28] It cannot escape the fact it's also a love story. none of us can fail to see that. Why should the almighty the lord of the universe and not only this universe but however many other universes there may be why should he bother only for one over mastering reason whose heart was set upon us.

In spite of our insignificance when we were yet without strength in spite of our wrong doing when we were yet sinners in spite of our rebellion while we continued in sin God loved us with an everlasting love.

Whenever you confront the gospel story you're confronted by two things the wonders of his glorious love and our own worthlessness.

yes it's a love story but most of all it is a true story. Here is a trustworthy saying a true story that deserves full acceptance.

It's not fiction however heartwarming it is fact. It is not disoriented imagination nor emotionalism.

We have the eyewitness accounts as well we have the personal testimonies of Paul and Timothy and every believer ever since and indeed I'm sure that most of you if not all of you this morning could not add your amen for this great true story Christ Jesus came into the world to save sins and so Paul would add I am the worst of the lot.

[11 : 36] I have two lovely granddaughters living in Melbourne whenever we visit we seem to have to bring an extra suitcase of all sorts of clothes and toys and props and books and all that sort of thing.

And whenever Ashley receives a book instantly she takes you by the hand and you've got to sit down and read the book. Now for Ashley that means reading means looking at the pictures.

And St. Paul is saying in speaking of the wonder and of the power and grace of Christ here is the example, here is the illustration.

I know this is true for I am the worst of the lot. And his witness is that he was shown mercy that's how it was.

He was the object of liberating grace. I was once a blasphemer he says, a persecutor, a violent man.

[12 : 47] But I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. Paul never lost the sense of guilt about the blood of the saints on his hands.

He was always humbled at the recollection of his former life and conduct. It was as though it had all occurred, he says, because of my ignorance and unbelief.

He acted as he saw it was at the time. But he had acted wrong. Paul arguably had one of the most brilliant minds of his times.

Illustrious graduate of Parsis University, his intellectual equipment, the second to none. Ignorance is not a word that sits well with Paul, but it was true.

You see, ignorance and unbelief can only ever be illuminated by the Spirit of God. And when the light of God's Spirit shines upon a man or a woman or a girl or a boy, it's as though the scales fall from their eyes and they see things clearly as never before.

[14 : 09] There's no doubt that the atheists hurt us, the agnostics hinder us, the humanists seem eloquent, the men of letters and learning seem to have it all neatly worked out.

The gurus are attractive and the talkback radio jockeys talk over anybody with a different point of view. But they are unbelieving and they are ignorant.

But when people come into contact with the Lord Jesus Christ, they are suddenly liberated. They're set free. They can see clearly as Paul was set free from his ignorance and unbelief.

not only did he receive liberating grace that set him free, but he received serving grace. You see, God never sets people free for no purpose at all.

It is always with an objective in mind. It's never an end in itself. It is always with a view to service. And he put Paul into his service.

[15 : 23] Paul says, he considered me faithful and appointed me to his service. I am an illustration, Timothy, of the liberating, serving, and enabling grace.

And Paul thanked the Lord Jesus for that great blessing and benefit. He has given me the strength for all of this. The grace of the Lord Jesus overflowed to me.

Timothy, do not be timid, do not hesitate, do not hold back in your service from a sense of insufficiency or inadequacy.

Our sufficiency is of God. Never does he call and appoint for some purpose without supplying all that's necessary for it. His enabling grace overflows.

The notion of overflowing there carries with it not just a quantity, quantity sufficient, but a quality. It was super grace.

[16 : 32] The quality of that grace that overflowed was illustrated in the life of Peter, who on one occasion prayed, Lord, depart from me, for I'm a sinful man.

It overflowed and transformed Saul of Carsus, who declared himself to the worst of sins. Paul could never forget the fact that God in his amazing love had rescued him.

Not only rescued him, but considered him faithful enough to appoint him in his divine service. A unique apostleship to take this gospel, this true story, throughout the whole world.

He rejoiced in it, he marvelled at the amazing power and love and grace of the Lord Jesus that overflowed him and enabled him and sustained him all his life and all his ministry.

And Paul knew that that just wasn't true for him personally, but for all those who came to believe as the result of his preaching, he saw it time and time again.

[17 : 42] No wonder when he's dictating this letter to Timothy at this point, he loses track of his argument and he breaks into a doxology of praise. Now to the King Eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, the honour and glory forever and ever.

Amen. I can see Paul then turning to his right hand saying, where was I up to before that? It was such a moving praise praise, but as he saw, the amazing grace, wonder and power of Christ.

Well, is that story still relevant? Is it still practical? Does it work today? I wanted to tell you something that I told some folk about yesterday in the Sin of Breakfast.

I want to tell you of a very marvellous thing that is happening now in the prisons of New South Wales. There are 29 prisons in New South Wales and at any one time there are 6,500 prisoners incarcerated there.

The chaplains have introduced into the program of ministry in Long Bay Jail to start with almost spreading throughout all the trials in the South Wales.

[19 : 06] A program which is called Kairos. Now if you know of Cusillo, the Emmaus Way, the Antioch Movement and so on, you will know that Kairos is a three and a half day program where 24 candidates, inmates of the prison, spend three and a half days with other Christian men who come into the prison, on a daily basis to tell them the story of Jesus, to share the gospel in life and in word

with those men.

Well, there's all sorts of things go on in that program and I haven't really got time to look down it for you. But just to give you some insight, all the meals are provided by ladies who cook home style meals.

You can imagine how the prisoners warmed to a plate of prawns. You can imagine how often that's served in a prison or biscuits.

Over 800 dozen biscuits are prepared by these team of supporters and none of them can have raisins in them because they could be boiled up for a grog or something like that.

And the men receive these as gifts of love. People write letters to them to assure them of love and support and care. just a friendly letter.

[20 : 31] And these men take these biscuits as part of this journey and they share them particularly with those other prisoners who are giving them a hard time, who they are afraid of and who are hostile to them.

Well at the end of this program a whole lot of people are invited to come for the closing ceremony and there's 200 or 250 people who have already travelled a similar journey.

You can imagine the surprise as these 24 candidates come into a room and find there are 250 others. And you have to hear to believe the cheers and the whistles and the hoots and the howls and the tears and the joy in this special congregation of people.

Well as part of this closing ceremony the men are invited to say something of what has happened or what they appreciate about this three and a half day journey. What a joy it is for me, I'm a complete outsider sitting in the congregation to hear a man stand up and say I was spiritually bankrupt without any future but I now have the Lord Jesus Christ another man stood up and he said I have never ever experienced genuine love before, unconditional love but I have experienced it for the first time and I'm just so grateful.

One man never to be released stood up and said well I'm still in prison but now I am free. I have no friends inside or outside of this place.

[22 : 28] Suddenly I discover I have 23 brothers and I have Christ as my personal son. Can you imagine what lies behind the story of this young man?

He said while I'm in here my family is in jail. I came from a strong Christian family and I strayed and I thought God had been here but I have rediscovered Jesus and his grace and love for me.

And then I lagged it up and said well I'm no good at talking I just want you to know that yesterday I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior.

There's the power of the gospel at work. There is the power in the gospel story. This is a true saying. It is relevant.

God is using it. He wants you to use it in your witness, in your work, with your neighbors, with your work, the people in them. Tell them the story. the story that is worthy of full acceptance.

[23 : 45] Christ Jesus came into the world to save Jesus. And now unto the King Eton, the mortal, invisible, the only God, the honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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