

Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners

Call to Worship: Psalm 147:1-11

Hymn #70- *Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven*

1st Scripture: Acts 9:1-22

Hymn #400- *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*

2nd Scripture: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Hymn #690- *Jesus Paid it All*

Introduction:

As Paul seeks to charge Timothy to command some in Ephesus to stick to the true doctrine (bound up in the Gospel that was delivered to them by Paul), and to turn away from fables and misuses of the law, we found him, last time, delving into his own testimony, as an example of one who was saved and put into the gospel ministry, solely by the exceedingly abundant grace of God. To this end, rather than seeking to add something of his own, to the righteousness that he has been fully and freely given in Christ, Paul shows (in a most personal way) that first, he could never add anything to the perfect and complete righteousness that he has already been given in Christ, and second, that should he seek to add anything to it, he would only serve to mar, ruin and diminish it.

This morning then, we continue on with the theme of Paul's personal testimony, where we will find him saying some pretty profound things, further exposing the utter poverty of his own personal righteousness, while exalting the complete and perfect righteousness, that he has been freely given in Christ. Again, all of this further serves to show that when it comes to our standing before God, there can be no improvement made upon the righteousness of Christ, by those who have been redeemed by Him. As our Lord said so well, at the conclusion of His agony on the cross, "It is finished!"

I. The Chief of Sinners (vs. 15)

And so, we left off last time, considering the exceedingly abundant grace of God toward Paul, as God had, in Christ, given Paul faith and love, in place of the unbelief and hatred he once had as a former blasphemer, persecutor and insolent man. And now, in verse 15, Paul reaches the top of the mountain of his self-abasement and Christ exaltation, when he concludes, "This is a

faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."

The transformation was so great; the movement from Paul's past to his present was so distant; the grace of God was so immense toward Paul, that Paul could say, "Look, without even the slightest bit of exaggeration; it would be entirely honest and true to say; it would be right and proper for everyone in the entire world to embrace, accept and confess the fact that Christ Jesus came into this world; He became man, for the very purpose of saving wicked, lost, dead sinners, of whom I (among that redeemed lot of wretched sinners) am chief. And so, from the standpoint of Paul, there are two great facts, which he wishes Timothy to draw out of this conclusion:

1) Christ did not come for the most wise or the most righteous persons in this world. He came, very specifically on a rescue mission, seeking to save ungodly, wicked, wretched sinners; natural born enemies of God. His whole purpose for traveling through the birth canal of a woman, adopting a whole and complete human nature; the great sum of Infinite God becoming finite man, is this: that He might save sinners! Save sinners from what? From the wrath of God, which is justly directed against sinners.

2) Paul considered himself the chief of sinners. That is to say, that Paul considered himself the worst of the worst (the very bottom of the barrel), not simply because he was a law breaker, but because he formerly blasphemed the Name of Christ, persecuted the church of Christ, and arrogantly did violence against the people of God, even voting to have them put to death.

Now, one might ask, "How is it that God could save such a wicked man then? If Paul is indeed the worst, then why did God show such mercy to Paul? Paul answers this question in verse 16.

II. The Chief of Sinners Shown Mercy (vs. 16)

"However, for this reason I obtained mercy..." "For this reason, God chose not to hold any of my terrible, wretched sins against me. For this reason, God washed me, cleansed me and forgave me in Christ." "...that in me *first* Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life."

And so, what is Paul saying here? Well, that although he is the chief of sinners, Jesus Christ would use Paul as an example to all who would come to believe in Jesus and have eternal life. In what way then, would Jesus use Paul as an example? He would show, through Paul, the great depths to which God would go to save sinners, who come to Jesus in faith. In other words, through Paul, Jesus would say, as it were, "Sinners, look this way. If I am willing to save this chief of sinners; if I am willing to extend such patience and longsuffering toward one who has blasphemed Me, while violently persecuting My church (My bride), then see how willing I am to save any and all who come to me, in repentance and faith. If this Paul has been spared and even called by Me, to serve in the Gospel ministry, then you are well within the reach of My grace and mercy as well. I've already dug deeper than you, in saving the chief of sinners, so come to Me, and find the same patience and grace directed toward you, in spite of your sins."

You see, Paul was a revelatory tool, revealing the exceedingly abundant grace of God to wicked, ungodly idolaters. Upon learning of the truth of God's Law, which exposes the reality of God's Holy nature and being; upon being convicted of the gravity of their sins, sinners would easily collapse under the weight of their guilt, if left in such a condition (or they would run away, hardening themselves further in the other direction, accepting the fact that they are simply beyond the reach of any hope). When there is no reason in you, whatsoever, for God to show you mercy, kindness and favor, and every reason for Him to cast you into outer darkness and everlasting torments, it is beyond a breath of fresh air, to find someone bearing that quality of guilt themselves, who has been freely forgiven in Christ, carrying the message of that free forgiveness in Christ to you! [Ill. The man who mocked and injured the king's son, having been graciously forgiven and exalted by the king, comes to you, who have been disobedient to the king, offering mercy, grace and peace in that same son]

And so, Paul here testifies that he is a walking billboard unto the wicked, rebellious, idolatrous gentile nations, proclaiming in bright neon letters, "If I have been freely given eternal life in Christ, then there is abundant hope for you...if you will but believe!"

III. A Relevant Doxology

Needless to say, such glorious truth drives Paul to blurt out a relevant Doxology of God-directed praise. "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

In recognizing that all that Paul now was, he was, in and by grace; in bringing to the fore, the truth of where he now was, and what he had come out of, Paul can do nothing else but glorify God for all that He has done. And remember, this stands right in the face of those teachers in Ephesus, who were attempting to add requirements to the law of God, as an alleged means of pursuing greater holiness, righteousness and wisdom. What Paul has proclaimed about the true nature and use of God's law, and what Paul has here revealed, in his own salvation and calling to the ministry, shows how utterly foolish it is to attempt to add anything whatsoever to what Christ has already freely given in Himself.

And so, Paul ascribes glory and honor (forever and ever) to God (and in this context, especially highlighting Jesus Christ), who is the King eternal [the all sovereign King over every age and realm, inside and outside of time and space], immortal [indestructible, incapable of dying or not existing; infinite, without beginning or end], invisible [without lines, occupying everywhere, fully and at all times, omnipresent], to God [to this One, divine being] who alone is wise [who alone possesses perfect knowledge and wisdom; omniscient and the source of all other wisdom], be honor and glory forever and ever.

Only such a God as this, who is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, eternal and infinite in every way, could possess such a deep and profound vault of grace, that could pardon even the chief of sinners! In essence, Paul is saying that, in consideration of God's holy character and nature, that He would go to such an extent of incarnating and crucifying His own eternal Son, so as to save that which would seem utterly unworthy of saving; in consideration of such a God, who being infinitely valuable and worthy of all worship and praise, who yet, could place such significant value on rebellious ungodly dust, let Him receive all honor and glory forever and ever! Amen.

Let Him get every ounce of glory, and let not a shred of that glory be given to anyone else. [III. You work for an individual who has built a wonderful empire. He has hired you to

care for it. You willfully and hatefully burn it to the ground, and in the process, your own life is about to be burnt up. He steps in and rescues you, rebuilds His empire and sets you over it again. When people come to speak to you about all that has happened, you begin to take credit for any part of the rebuilding process...etc]

IV. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) While probably none of us have actually persecuted Christ's church or committed any tangible acts of premeditated murder, let me ask you, brethren, how do you view yourself in the light of God's righteous law? How do you imagine yourself, apart from Christ, in the presence of God? What do you see in your natural self? Can you relate to Paul, in some sense; in some significant sense, when he calls himself the "chief of sinners?" Do you come undone and see yourself as utterly reprehensible in the mirror of God's righteousness?

I can say for myself, that that is a horrific sight, and if I spend too much time there, looking in the mirror of my own natural depravity, I will melt in utter shame and despair. Even as a Christian, while there is great improvement, we can never, even on our best day, view ourselves apart from who we are in Christ. [Ill. Looking at something that seems so white, until you hold it up to pure white; it then looks terribly off white or even yellow or worse]

All of that said, brethren, do you, like Paul then, see yourself as a pattern of hope for others who will come to believe in Christ? When witnessing to others, do you have an, "If Christ can forgive and save me, He can save anyone," mindset, which leads you to come alongside of people...or do you look down on the lost, as if you are, in any sense better than they are, when unclothed with the righteousness of Christ? Oh brethren, if you find yourself measuring others as naturally worse than you are, pray God to give you a better peek into your own heart. It won't take much, to behold the truth, and to come back to the realization of your utter dependence upon the grace of God in every respect. You see, you will only have a proper view of other sinners, if you have a proper view of yourself. And when you find yourself wholly clinging for dear life in Christ, you will be slow to condemn, and quick to point them to the same refuge.

God's great mercy toward us, brethren, ought to be a pattern for others; an invitation, as it were, calling others into the cleansing bath of Christ's blood, which alone is capable of washing away your own crimson red stains of guilt.

2) Recognize again, the glorious purpose for why Jesus came. Yes, Paul here makes a statement of absolute assurance about himself being the chief of sinners, but never minimize the fact that he also says, that it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance to say that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!

Let me ask you, this morning, what better news is there in all the world, than to know that the Son of God entered this world; He became one of us, specifically for the purpose of saving *sinners!* He didn't come, simply to present a moral example (although He did that). He didn't come to search for the righteous...because there are none, no not one! God became man; God became flesh, for the primary purpose of redeeming, and dying in the place of sinners, who were alienated from their holy God because of their sins!

And friends, that means that although you might be presently an enemy of God; although you have violated God's good and righteous laws, times without number (in your motives, thoughts, words and actions), you can be freely forgiven and reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, because Jesus came to save sinners (like you and me) from our sins. You might say, "My guilt is so obvious. I can't get out from under the weight of this sin. I'm trapped and condemned by God's Law..." Jesus says, "Come to Me, and I will take that burden, in all of its fullness, and bear it for you! I will nail it to My cross; I will crucify and bury it with Me, and I will rise up alone without it." Jesus can bury all of your sins forever, not to be hidden from God, but to be paid for, in full, by the Son of God, who died on behalf of sinners!

And what are the glorious benefits to be freely received in Christ? They are all wrapped up in these words, "everlasting life." What a miserable reality "death" is! Life is such a wonderful blessing; a treasured gift from God! And yet, death has come upon us because of our sin. But, through faith in Jesus Christ, we are freely given eternal life! From a spiritual standpoint, this begins in this life, if we are united to Christ, by faith. And then, just beyond the grave; just beyond the gateway of this temporal life, we are eternally thrust into the glorious presence of God, loved and received by God, in His Son! And from that moment on, there will

never, ever, not even for a moment, be a time when the people of God will suffer (not so much as the pain of stubbing a toe), and there will be no more death or sorrow or tears...for those will all be former realities! Every moment there will be a moment of full and perfect joy, in the presence of God and His people! It will be a world of perfect love, and perfect joy, forever!

This, my friends, is a guarantee, for any and all, who truly repent of their sins, now, in this life, putting your complete confidence in Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ alone, to save you from your sins! This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners!

Amen!!!

The Lord's Supper!