

Wow, that was really good. I don't think I've ever been in church where we clapped for Christmas hymn. But that really was so good. What a joy it is to be here today and to be able to worship the Lord on Christmas morning of all mornings.

So we have so much that we are going to look at today in God's Word and this really rises to the top of the day for me to learn more about the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel that is mighty to save. So I invite you to take your Bible, as always, and turn with me to the Book of Timothy, 1 Timothy. 1 Timothy 1 and today we're going to look at just one verse. We're going to look at verse 15. We're going to step out of our series through Genesis because today is Christmas and I'm going to bring a Christmas message. The title of this message is Why Jesus Came. Why Jesus Came.

But I want to read the larger section in which it's found and I'm going to begin reading at 1 Timothy 1:12 and I'll read through verse 17. But I want you to know that my eye is especially on verse 15 and your eye will be drawn to verse 15 for this message.

So let me begin by reading this wonderful, wonderful text that serves us so well today on Christmas. The apostle Paul writing to his young son in the faith, Timothy, writes, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me because he considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formally a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly and in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was more than abundant with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus." Here's our text for today. "It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners among whom I am foremost of all." Verse 16, "Yet for this reason, I found mercy so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate his perfect patience as an example of those who would believe in him for eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

So let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, what a glorious passage we have to feast upon this day. I pray that you'd cultivate our hunger to know yet more and more of your truth and of Christ. I pray for my brothers and sisters gathered here today that you would extraordinarily bless them on this Christmas morning with the truth concerning your son, Jesus Christ. I pray that you would lavish your grace upon them, that today would be a very significant day in their Christian journey of faith. I pray you would fill me with your spirit. Lay your hand upon me for good. Use me as a tool and instrument to teach and preach your word in an accurate and faithful manner. So I commit myself, I commit this message, I commit each and every one of us to your hands. I pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

In these verses, we find the primary reason why Jesus came into the world. Now, we know who he was. He was the son of God, the Son of Man. He was the son of Abraham, the son of David. He was the Lord of heaven and earth. He was the eternal Word made flesh, the great I Am. He was the bread of life, the light of the world. He was the door, the sheep, the good shepherd. He was the resurrection and the life. He was the way and the truth and the life. He was and is the true vine. And so we know exactly who he is. We

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know where he came. He came to Israel. He did not go to Australia, New Zealand or what would become later the states. No, he came to Israel and more specifically, he came to Bethlehem, the city of David. And we know when he came. He came in the full list of time. He came in the year that Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census be taken of the entire inhabited earth. That was either 6 or 5 BC.

And we know how he came. He was born of a virgin. He was sired by the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and what was conceived in her was the Christ child, the holy offspring. So we know where he came. We know when he came. We know how he came. But why? That's always the probing question, why? Why did he come?

And there are many secondary reasons that the Bible gives on why he came. He came to reveal God to us. The disciples asked him, show us the Father and that's enough. And Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the father." Jesus was, according to Scripture, the image of the invisible God. He came to make God visibly, audibly seen and heard. We know what God is like because we have seen Jesus Christ.

Jesus also came to show us how to live. He became the ultimate example. In fact, the gospel message is, "Follow me." And that means we would walk in a manner as he walked. We would follow him on the narrow path and live as he lived. He also came to be the true interpreter of the law. He is not only the lawgiver but he is also the great expositor of the law. I preached the greatest sermon ever to be preached, the Sermon on the Mount. And in that sermon, Jesus expounded the law. He said, "You have heard that it was said but I say unto you" and he gave the correct interpretation of the law of God. And Jesus also came to be a sympathetic high priest. He came and entered into the human race and he lived in this world just like you and I live in this world and he was surrounded by all the pressures and temptations that face us. He knows what it's like experientially to live in this world. Not just cognitively and intellectually, but experientially. He came to this earth and in essence, he got into our skin. And so now when we pray, we have at the right hand of God the Father, a merciful high priest who has been tempted with every temptation with which we have been tempted. These are all secondary reasons for which Jesus came.

And there's only one primary reason that Jesus came and our text tells us loud and clear what that is. He came to seek and to save that which is lost. Jesus came to be the Savior of sinners. He did not come to redeem the culture. He came to redeem sinners. And as sinners would be redeemed, the culture will be changed. But he didn't die on the cross for the culture. He died upon the cross to redeem sinners like you and me.

And what we have in verse 15 is in reality the gospel in a nutshell. This is the John 3:16 of Paul's writings. This verse, verse 15 is right up there on a short list of the most important verses in the Bible that deal with the gospel. It is a succinct statement of the gospel.

Now, I want to take verse 15 with you this morning and I want to divide it into three parts. And we're just going to walk through this literally one word at a time. First, I want

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you to note what will be the priority of this statement. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. And then I want you to note the person of this statement, that Christ Jesus, he's the person that's come into this world to save sinners. And then finally, the power of the statement that it is so powerful that even the foremost sinner, even the chief of sinners can be saved. And if the chief of sinners can be saved, anyone here today can also be converted. So let's walk through this passage. It's a perfect Christmas passage as it identifies why Jesus came.

Now, let's begin at the beginning of verse 15. I want you to note the priority of this statement. Paul begins this verse by stressing the supreme importance of what is found in the very middle of this verse, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. But he begins by establishing the priority of this when he says, "It is a trustworthy statement". Don't let that pass you by. The word 'trustworthy' means highly reliable. It means certain and sure and it is to be trusted. Now, why would Paul say this? Isn't everything that he wrote trustworthy? Does this cast dispersion or doubt upon everything else that he wrote? Isn't everything in the Bible trustworthy? And the answer to that is yes. All scripture is inspired by God. So why does he start this verse, "It is a trustworthy statement"? Why doesn't he start every verse in his 13 Epistles this way? And here's the answer.

It is a way that Paul had to underscore what is of most importance. Every verse that he wrote that finds itself in the Bible is equally inspired but everything is not equally important. Some things are more important than other things that Paul wrote. And this is one of these. This is like Jesus saying, which he said on many occasion, "truly, truly I say unto you" which is literally "amen, amen, I say to you". That is to capture the attention of the listener and the reader that what immediately follows is of Mount Everest high-rising importance that towers over other things that he said. This is one of the most important things to ever come from the pen of the apostle Paul. He will use this phrase four other times in the pastoral Epistles. This is Paul's way of putting verse 15 by starting it this is a trustworthy statement, this is like Paul putting it in bold font, all caps, italicized, underlined, and then highlighted with a yellow highlighter. And then having a finger pointing at it and a spotlight on it, okay? So Paul does not want us to miss the importance of this.

And when he says, "statement," it's a trustworthy statement. This word 'statement' is a Greek word that you'll recognize the word when I say it **lagas**. And most times it refers to a verbal saying. A spoken word, a spoken statement. And what follows in the middle of this verse is a well-known saying in the early church. In the first century church that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners was a very popular, often repeated statement sort of like how they would say Jesus is Lord. It was a condensed, abbreviated confession of faith tightly worded that distinguished true Christianity. What we have in the middle of verse 15 is the very heart and soul of Christianity. The message of the gospel. What we have in the middle of verse 15 is the bare essence and core truth of the gospel. In order to be a Christian, a true Christian, you have to believe what is contained in verse 15. It's nonnegotiable.

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And so much so he says it's "deserving full acceptance." The word 'deserving' here is a Greek word that means weighty. This verse is not to be taken lightly. It's a very weighty verse that demands something of the listener. It's a very demanding text. And it says, "deserving full acceptance." Wholehearted acceptance. Complete acceptance. You can't marginalize this verse and be a Christian. To be a true believer of Jesus Christ, you must receive this with full acceptance, with all of your heart or you are not in the Kingdom of God. To be in the Kingdom of God, you must receive this with full acceptance. In other words, if you believe anything in the Bible, you must believe this: this stands at the head of the list.

Now, where did the statement come from? Did Paul come up with this statement that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners? And the answer is no. It was a statement that was already circulating in the first century churches. And the most plausible explanation of the source or origin of this trustworthy statement is that it is a restatement of two statements that were spoken by Jesus Christ verbally. And the early church latched onto these two statements and they married the two together. They merged the two together and made it very compact into this trustworthy statement.

Now, what were those two statements from the lips of our Lord that became this trustworthy statement? Well, the first is found in Matthew 9:13 in which Jesus said, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners." Two important words in that verse; 'come' and 'sinners.' "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

The other statement from the lips of our Lord is in Luke 19:10 is that text that concerns the conversion of Zacchaeus. And you remember as Jesus walking along and Zacchaeus was in the sycamore tree and Jesus looked up and saw him and said, "Zacchaeus, come down. Today I must dine with you." And that was the day of his conversion. At the very end of that narrative in Luke 19 is verse 10 in which it is recorded, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." And so two keywords there, 'come' and 'save.' And so when you take these two verses and combine them together, the result is this trustworthy statement. This is the most plausible explanation of from whence this statement has come.

So what I want to do is walk through this trustworthy statement. If it's this important, then we need to give attention to this and that's what I want to do. So, we've seen the priority of this statement. It's a trustworthy statement. Rises to the heights of importance for everyone.

Now second, the person of this trustworthy statement. And the person is found right here. Christ Jesus. The gospel is all about Jesus Christ and him coming into this world on a mission of salvation. As we look at this trustworthy statement that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, it's nine words in our English Bible. It's eight words when Paul first wrote it in the Greek language. And what we learned from this, and you can see it for yourself right there in your own Bible, is that the gospel concerns the person of Jesus Christ. The person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the Alpha and the Omega of the gospel. The beginning and the end. The sum and the substance. He is the gospel. He is

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the Savior of the world. And **Charles had dispersion** once one said, "The more gospel we would preach, the more of Christ we much preach."

And I just need to make this point that your testimony and my testimony is not the gospel. The gospel is not about me. The gospel is about Jesus Christ. My testimony is how I came to believe the gospel but my testimony is not the gospel. Jesus Christ is the gospel. And so as God gives you opportunity to be a witness for him, you're not talking about yourself if you want someone to be converted. You're talking about Jesus Christ. Now, you may mention how Christ has saved you and how Christ has impacted your life but don't mistake what the gospel is all about. It's not about you and it's not about me. It's about Jesus Christ.

Now, because this trustworthy statement is so important, I want us to look at it one word at a time. And I want you to know four things about this trustworthy statement. The first thing is, I want you to note who came. It says, "Christ Jesus." Now, we just need to pause there for a moment. Christ, what does Christ mean? The word 'Christ' means 'the anointed one.' The one who is anointed by the Holy Spirit and endued with power from on high in his sinless humanity to carry out his saving mission in the power of God.

Now, the anointed one. When Jesus inaugurated his public ministry, he went to the river Jordan and John the Baptist was there and John was baptizing those who had repented of their sins and who had committed their life to the Messiah. And John baptized Jesus so that he would identify with sinners and to fulfill all righteousness. And as Jesus was being baptized in the river Jordan, the heavens opened and God the Father spoke, "This is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased." And the Holy Spirit descended out of heaven and rested upon the Lord Jesus Christ. He came like the form of a dove though it was not a dove. It was the power of the Holy Spirit that now resided in the Lord Jesus Christ. And in his sinless humanity, he was supernaturally empowered to carry out his mission of salvation. When we read Luke's gospel in Luke 4:1, it says, "Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit." It means governed and controlled by the Holy Spirit. It says that "he was led by the Holy Spirit." In Luke 4 in verse 14 it says that, "he was empowered by the Spirit." And in Luke 4:18, we read that he went into his hometown of Nazareth, went into the synagogue. They handed him the scroll of Isaiah the prophet. He unraveled it, unrolled it to what is for us Isaiah 61.1. He stood and he read it to those who gathered in the synagogue. "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me for the Lord has anointed me to preach." And he hands it back to the head of the synagogue and says, "Today this has been fulfilled in your ears." That's the Christ, the anointed one. And the power, the Holy Spirit of God, supernaturally endued with omnipotence to carry out his three years of public ministry. And it was the Holy Spirit who would enable him to be faithful unto death on the cross on our behalf.

And by the way, if Jesus Christ needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit to carry out his ministry, in an argument from the greater to the lesser, how much more do you and I need the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us to take even one baby step to move forward in living the Christian life? Jesus was the Christ and as such, he was the long-awaited promised Messiah. This is the one who came.

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But the next name is Jesus. You see that in your Bible. Christ Jesus. What does 'Jesus' mean? The name Jesus means Jehovah saves or Yahweh saves. Jesus was God, Jehovah in human flesh. He was, as the ancient confession said, "He was truly God and truly man." He was the God man. God in human flesh. Matthew 1:21, the angel said, "You shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins." The very name Jesus marks out the mission of his life. It was to come and save sinners.

Now, the name Jesus which we see here in this passage, it dominates the entire New Testament. Do you know how many times the name Jesus is used in the New Testament? If I told you 100 times, you would think wow, that is a lot. If I told you 150, you would think that's a huge number. The name Jesus is used in the New Testament 849 times. The entire New Testament is dominated by the name Jesus.

And so this morning, as I woke up early, I thought I'm just going to check something out. So I went to the very beginning of the New Testament and I turned to Matthew 1:1 just to remind myself how does the New Testament start? What does the first verse say? And the New Testament begins this way. "The record of the genealogy of Jesus." Boom, there it is. The very first verse of the New Testament. I thought okay, I'm going to see how does the New Testament end. So I turned back to the very end to Revelation 22, and I went to the very last verse. I mean, I knew three times in that last chapter Jesus says, "Behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me." But I couldn't remember, what is the very last verse? And in Revelation 22:21, it says, "The Grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen." So the New Testament begins with Jesus. The New Testament concludes with Jesus. And in between, a total of 849 times. He dominates the landscape of the New Testament. In fact, just looking at this, I said 849, I'm just looking at my notes here. I should use my notes more often. It's more than that. It's 875 times; 875.

And so just look at this one chapter 1 Timothy. I thought okay, I wonder what it looks like in just this one chapter. So I thought okay, I'll just look at this one chapter. How often is Jesus mentioned? Well, look at chapter 1, verse one. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, according to the commandment of God our Savior" that's the Father, "and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope." The very first verse of this book Jesus is mentioned twice. Look at the next verse, verse 2. "To Timothy, my true son in the faith, grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." I can't even get into this book without immediately meeting Jesus Christ. And then in verse 12, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord." Then verse 14, "Faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus." Verse 15 where we are, "Christ Jesus came into the world." Verse 16, "Christ Jesus might demonstrate his perfect patience as an example." Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. I wish I had time to take us to other books in the New Testament. If you took the book of Philippians and just drew a circle around every time you see the name Jesus or Christ or Lord, it would be amazing to you. And that's just an example.

So who came at Christmas? Christ Jesus. God in human flesh. The long-awaited promised Messiah. Now, where did he come? That's second. Where he came. Notice as we continue through this trustworthy statement it says, "Christ Jesus," here it is, "came

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into the world." The word 'came' means to move from one location to another. So he didn't start out in this world. He started out in heaven. And he came. He came down into this world. And no one ever started so high and came down so low as the Lord Jesus Christ. He descended down from palaces of glory all the way down into the muck and the mire of this world. He came into this sin-cursed world. He came down into this pool of inequity. Into this arrogant, blasphemous world. And note the word 'into'. He actually came into this world. He didn't come close to this world. He didn't hover over this world. He didn't come just to be next to this world or just to rub shoulders with this world. To be in close proximity to this world. No, he actually came into this world. And he came into the human race. He got into our skin. He could not have come into this world any more than what he did.

And third, I want you to note why he came. It's the next two words. "Christ Jesus came into the world" here's why. Two words. "To save." Now, what does the word 'save' mean? I used to have a Jewish friend in high school and he would tell me yeah, Moses invested, Jesus saves. And I said you know, that's really not funny. What does this mean, Jesus saves? Well, the word 'save' means to rescue someone who is in great danger of destruction. The word means to deliver someone out of a perilous situation in which they have no hope of survival or escape. Jesus came on a rescue mission. He came to rescue sinners. And so he came to save, and I think we must ask the question, save us from what? And you no doubt have heard me say this before. It's not that he came to save us from a what, he came to save us from a who. Jesus came to save us from God. From the wrath of God. He didn't come to save us to help us have a happy life, a better life. The results of his salvation will be we will be put into abundant life. But he came to save us from the final judgment and the wrath of God.

Now, I know at Christmas time, we just always think about kind of a cuddly little situation. A manger. Some animals. Some straw. A trough. Angels singing. It's almost like chestnuts roasting. It's a warm, little, snuggly setting. And I think too often we lose really the reason why he came into this world. He did not come to create a holiday. He came to save sinners who were about to slip into eternal hell and never to escape.

Think of salvation this way. I want to give you four little prepositional phrases. He came to save us from God, by God, in God, and for God. He came to save us from God's wrath. Just write that down. By God's grace. In God's son, for God's glory. There you have it. He came to save us from God's wrath, by God's grace, in God's son, for God's glory. The only one who can save us from God is God himself. And that is what God has done in sending his son into this world mission of salvation, a rescue mission. It is to deliver us from the wrath to come and the final judgment and the sentence of death that is already hanging over the head of every person. He has come to slip the noose off of our neck. He has come to release us out of the electric chair. He has come to spring us out of the gas chamber and to take us away from slipping down into the lake of fire and brimstone that burns forever. Now, I know that's not just a warm snuggly Christmas message. It's just the truth. And so he came to save.

And I want to say to everyone in this room, you need to be saved. I need to be saved. Because from the moment of our conception in our mother's womb, we were lost and perishing. What do you have to do to go to hell? The answer is absolutely nothing. You're already going to hell. You must be saved from eternal destruction.

Now, the fourth thing I want you to see is not only what he came but for whom he came. This is very important. It's the next word. In fact, it's the last word of this trustworthy statement. It's the word 'sinners'. That's for whom he came. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Sinners are those who have fallen short of the glory of God. Sinners are those who have been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Sinners are those who have missed the mark. They have broken the law of God. Sinners are those who have gone their own way. And the penalty for their sin is already hanging over their head. He has come to save sinners.

But Jesus came to save only one kind of person. Sinners. He didn't come to save good people for there is none good, no, not one. He came to save bad people. Very bad people. Jesus was the great physician who came not for those who are well but for those who are sick. He came not for those who are righteous but for those who are unrighteous. Jesus only died for sinners upon the cross. And this is why, if anyone is ever to be saved, you must confess you are a sinner, a wretched, guilty, lawbreaking sinner, and throw yourself upon the mercy of this Savior Jesus Christ or there is no salvation for you.

How did he save? How did he save us? His sinless life and his substitutionary death. He saved us by his life and by his death. He saved us by his life in that he was born under the law and he lived a life of perfect obedience to the law of God. He fulfilled all righteousness. And by his perfect obedience to the law, he has secured a perfect righteousness that is credited to the account of everyone who places their faith and trust in him. The life I could not live he lived in my place and when I believe in him, I am credited with his perfect life and perfect obedience and perfect righteousness.

And he also saved us by his substitutionary death. That upon the cross, all the sins of all the people of all generations, of all continents, of all ethnic groups who would ever put their faith in him. He became sin for them. 2 Corinthians 5:21, "He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us." He bore our sins in his body upon the cross. And as Jesus became sin for us, he became our scapegoat who took our sins far away. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And by the shedding of his blood unto death, Jesus has satisfied the righteous anger of God. He has reconciled us to God and he has redeemed us out of the slave market of sin and Satan. That's what Jesus has done for us.

And this is the trustworthy statement in its most succinct, compressed, minimalistic number of words. Even more tightly worded than John 3:16. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Nine words. That is the gospel. That is the good news of salvation. This is why he came. Again, not to create a holiday. He came to save sinners.

Now, some of you here today may be thinking you know, I really didn't grow up in the church. I didn't grow up going to Bible studies. I didn't go to a Christian school. And yet



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here I am here today surrounded by people who grew up in a Christian family and who went to a Christian school and have gone to Christian Bible studies. And you may be thinking, I have such a soiled and sinful past, could Jesus save me? The answer is a resounding yes, if you will confess your sin and throw yourself upon his mercy because look who he came to save. He didn't come to save church people. He didn't come to save people who go to Bible studies. He came to save sinners. Even sinners who go to church and even sinners who go to a Bible study. And even sinners who have gone to a Christian school. With the across-the-board common denominator for anyone and everyone who's ever been converted and enter the kingdom of heaven is that you know that you are a sinner. And you've been weighed in the balances and found wanting and you do not measure up to the divine standard and you desperately need salvation. And there's only one Savior and it's Jesus Christ. That, in a nutshell, is the message of Christmas.

Now, there's one more thing I want you to see in this text and it's really good. We have seen the priority of the statement and we've seen the person, Christ, of the statement. But what I want you to see finally the power of this statement. Because here is the power of the gospel displayed. And as Paul writes this, this is a rare time in which he is autobiographical where he talks about himself. First person, singular pronoun I. Paul rarely is talking about him. He's always talking about Jesus. But this is a rare time in which he talks about himself. But please note the self-deprecating way with which he talks about himself. He's not promoting himself as this high ranking apostle. He calls himself the four most of all sinners. There something for us to learn here. Even as we give our testimony to not be elevating ourselves but in a sense lowering our self as a great sinner who has met a great Savior.

And so please note at the end of verse 15 concludes, "Among whom," and the 'whom' refers to all the sinners in the world. "Among whom I am foremost of all." The word 'foremost' here means chiefest or greatest. It's in what we call a superlative degree. And let me give you an example of the superlative degree when God says he is holy, holy, holy, that means that God is holy, holier, holiest. He's not just holy. And he's not just holier than others. He is the holiest being in the entire universe. There is no one holier than God.

Another example of superlative degree is good, better, best. Paul here uses the superlative to degree "I am foremost of all sinners." He's saying I'm not just a sinner and I'm not just a great sinner. I'm the greatest sinner who has ever lived. And then we would ask ourselves, Paul, are you just speaking with hyperbole? Is this an exaggerated statement? Is this over the top? Are you just drawing attention to yourself by putting it this way? And the answer is no. As Paul writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he can only write what is true. And he is the greatest sinner.

And the way by which he is the greatest sinner is we must understand that all sin is not the same. Some sins are greater than other sins. And to commit the greatest sin makes you a greater sinner than others. Some teachers here in Dallas will tell you all sin is the same. Well, they need to study their Bible a little bit more carefully. When you look in the Old Testament for example, under the law, some sins require the death penalty

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because they were more egregious. They were greater sins. Then other breaking of the law, which required a lesser punishment because it was a lesser sin. And at the heart of the justice in the Old Testament is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. That's a glorious first, by the way. And what it simply means is the punishment should match up with the crime. That if you jay walk across the street in the middle of a block, you should not receive the death penalty. And if you kill someone, you should not have to pay a \$25 fine. That the greater the sin, the greater the punishment.

And so what is the greatest sin? Well, the greatest sin is to fail to obey the greatest commandment. There is one commandment that's greater than the other commandments. Right? And it is the love the Lord your God with all of your heart and all of your soul and all of your mind and all of your strength. And coupled with that is to reject the greatest message and the greatest news to ever be presented to you. It is that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And so to reject the greatest commandment and to reject the greatest message is to commit the greatest sin. The greatest sin in Dallas, Texas this morning may be committed right here in this house of worship. A far greater sin that would be committed in a house of prostitution. Or drug transactions. Because the greatest sin is to reject the Lord Jesus Christ. And the apostle Paul was hell-bent on rejecting Jesus Christ.

And he had the greater exposure to the law of God. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. A Pharisee of Pharisees. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel. The apostle Paul was given by God an extraordinary intellect and he knew the Old Testament inside out and outside in. And he heard the gospel and he saw. He was right there when Stephen said before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7 and preached that extraordinary walk through the entire Bible and Saul of Tarsus stood right there and held the ropes as everyone reached for the rocks. And they stoned Stephen to death. Saul of Tarsus could have stepped in and stopped it. He was an agreeable bystander. No, he was committing the greatest sin and he documents that in verse 13 which I read at the beginning of this message. Look at verse 13. There are four words that I want to draw to your attention in verse 13 that identify Paul in his pre-conversion state. It's 'blasphemer', 'persecutor' and 'violent aggressor.' Do you see that? That's what Paul was and he knew it.

The word 'blasphemer', what does that mean? That means one who speaks evil of God. It means a slanderer. One who slanders the name of God. One who speaks evil of God. And that is what he did when he rejected the one who is God in human flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, in Acts 26:11, Paul says, "I tried to force them" the Christians, "to blaspheme." Not only was he a blasphemer who spoke evil of the son of God and the Son of Man, he forced and coerced other Christians to blaspheme the name of God at the thread of their life.

And then look at the next word, 'persecutor' in verse 13. It's not enough that he was a blasphemer but he was a persecutor. And what does the word persecutor mean? It really means someone who's a chaser or a pursuer. And the idea is that you are chasing people and running them out of town. You are running them out of their family. You are chasing them out of their employment. And a persecutor is an aggressive harasser and abuser and

that's what Paul was. Paul spent his life, before he met Christ, entering homes and arresting Christians and dragging them out physically. In Acts 8:3 we read, "Saul began ravaging the church." And the picture there is of a wild beast in a field that is hungry and it has caught a pray and has sunk his teeth into the prey and is just dragging that prey through the field and ravaging it. We read, "Saul began ravaging the church." He was a spiritual terrorist. And entering house after house and dragging off men and women, and he would put them in prison. He's not just sitting on the back pew of the synagogue in unbelief and just watching everything unfold. No one could match the intense hatred that Paul had for the gospel and for Christians.

And then this continues to build in verse 13. Not only a blasphemer and a persecutor, Paul adds, "and a violent aggressor." It's one word in the original language and it means someone who is obsessed with violence. Paul treated Christians with brutality and brute force. He was heartless towards the Christians. He was merciless. He was bloodthirsty to destroy Christians. He ran roughshod over them and abused them with all of his might. And rejected the gospel and trampled underfoot the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and he insulted the spirit of Grace again and again and again. He was public enemy number one for the Christians.

But as we used to say in sports, the bigger they are, the harder they fall. And on that Damascus road, as Saul had letters in hand to arrest the Christians, the risen Christ knocked him off his high horse and he looked up and said, "Who are you Lord? What would you have me to do?" And in that moment, he was dramatically and soundly converted. No, he knew in his heart of hearts he was, he was the chiefest sinner. I looked up this word 'foremost' or 'chiefest'. It's most often translated first and in other places it's translated foremost. We could combine those two together and say Paul understood he was first and foremost the greatest sinner who had ever walked the earth because he had committed the greatest sins.

And we need to understand hell will not be the same for everyone. There will be some places in which there will be a severe punishment than in other places. Some places of hell will be hotter than other places. And to commit the greater sin is to be confined and consigned to the place of greatest, most severe punishment. And Paul understood I was on that road and that's where I was headed and that's what I deserved until Christ Jesus who came into this world, rescued me and delivered me from that eternal destruction that I so deserved. And he intervened and pulled me out of the miry pit and set me upon a rock and put a new song in my heart. He made me a new creature in Christ Jesus. The old things passed away. Behold, new things have come. This is the power of the gospel to radically change and transform any and every once life who puts their faith in Jesus Christ. And if you have met Jesus Christ, your life has been radically changed and transformed.

Or you've never met Jesus Christ. You cannot meet Jesus Christ and remain the same. He's issuing out far more than certificates of forgiveness. He does do that but for everyone who receives one, he also gives the transformation of that life from the inside out. What a text this is? "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners among whom I

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am foremost of all." No wonder Paul begins this with a trustworthy statement. Deserving full acceptance.

Now, I want to ask you a very personal question. A very important question that only you can answer before God. Did Jesus come into this world to save you? That's as personal as it can be. He came into this world, Matthew 1:21 says, "to save his people from their sins." He laid down his life for his sheep. He purchased the church with his blood. He bought the church of true believers wherever they meet. Did Jesus come into this world to save you?

Well, the only way you can truly know is to commit your life to him. To repent of your sins. To confess your sin to him. And to believe in him. To commit your life to him. And if you will, if you will surrender your life to him, if you will submit to his Lordship, if you will embrace him by faith, I can assure you he came into this world to save you and to rescue you.

And so if you have never believed upon Jesus Christ, I cannot think of a better time than this moment to entrust your soul to him. If he can save the greatest sinner, he can save you. He has oceans and galaxies of grace to save and wash away the little thimble of your sin. He is able to save under the uttermost. Spurgeon said if "Noah could get the elephant onto the ark, he can get the ant onto the ark." And if God can save the chief of sinners, he can save you. There's not a person in this room who does not need to be saved. Each and every one of us need to be saved because we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But this trustworthy statement is your way to settle out of court. It is your way to find the forgiveness and the mercy of God to wash away all of your sins. It is to believe upon this one, Christ Jesus, who entered this world to save sinners. May you do so today. You have no other hope. You have no other Savior. You have no other option but to believe in him. And he will save you forever if you will trust him. Let us pray.

Father, how we bless you for giving to us your son, Jesus Christ, to die upon the cross, for our sins. Thank you that he has come to enter the human race that he may take us up to the heights of heaven. Bless each and everyone who are here today in Christ's name. Amen.

Would you stand for the closing benediction and then we will be dismissed. It comes from Paul's letter to the Ephesians and we end with this glorious, triumphant note on this Christmas morning. "Now to him, who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

God bless you. Merry Christmas. I'll see you next year.

*[End of Audio]*