

## Jason Upchurch - 1 Timothy 1:12-17 - Christmas Eve 2023 - Jesus Gives

As we come together and celebrate the Lord Jesus this evening I want to look a passage in **1 Tim. 1** that celebrates the coming of Jesus into the world.

This is a passage where Paul celebrates the mercy of Jesus in salvation. Paul says the famous line: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost. Or whom I am chief.

That's what we celebrate this evening: that Jesus came into the world to save us from our sins. That's really the most precious thing we have from Jesus. We're sinners, deserving of the eternal wrath of God, and in love God sent Jesus to trade places with all those who believe in him and save us from the Father's wrath.

If that were all that Jesus did, that would be more than enough. But what we find out in this passage is that he gave us far more.

As I was looking at this passage this week I realized that in just a small paragraph Paul doesn't just talk about the gift of forgiveness that Jesus gives us, although he does. He actually mentions 12 things that Jesus gives by coming into the world. Paul puts these all in the first person - these are things that Jesus gave to Paul. But I think as we look at these we'll realize these are all things we can say are ours as well through faith in Christ.

And so in the spirit of giving gifts in celebration of Christmas, I want to look at 12 things Jesus gives by coming into the world to encourage our hearts this evening.

Paul is giving a little summary of his testimony here. He's not giving us the whole Damascus road story. He's just hitting the highlights and basically his point is that if God can use a sinner like him for the Kingdom, then God can use a sinner like us for the Kingdom.

Now, as we read this I want you to think of all the things Paul mentions Jesus gives him and then we'll break it down one by one. I'll read the whole section and then we'll break it down one by one. **Read 12-17**

### 1) Given us strength. **Read 12**

The first thing Paul mentions is strength. Jesus has given Paul strength. What kind of strength? It could be physical strength. Not that Paul was some sort of power lifter able to squat massive barbells full of weight.

It may have been simply the strength to endure whatever he was going through. Paul faced a lot of opposition in his life, much of it physical abuse and torture for his faith in Jesus. If you ever look at **2 Cor. 11** he mentions all his imprisonments, countless beatings, 5 times he receive 40-minus-1 lashings that would have severed his back, 3 times he was beaten with rods, 3 shipwrecks, starvation, he had to work to make a living, sleepless nights, so on. If you remember in Acts they actually stoned Paul and left him thinking he was dead.

Paul endured a lot of physical abuse because of his faith in Jesus. And yet he endured. How? I think Jesus supernaturally carried him through it. There are many times when we go through incredible times and really the only way to explain that we made it is because God gave us strength.

But I think there's also another kind of strength Paul has in mind and that is spiritual strength. How do you get spiritual strength? You get spiritual strength by remembering God's grace toward us. Listen to this:

**2 Tim. 2:1:** Be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

**Heb 13:9:** Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace.

Christians are strengthened spiritually by grace. How? When we are reminded over and over of the gospel of grace.

See the gospel isn't just for lost sinners. The gospel is for Christians too. Who need to be constantly reminded that our sins are eternally forgiven. That we're still part of the family of God, with God as our Father. Not because of what we've done, but in spite of what we've done. Simply through believing in Jesus.

And God has given us specific ways to remind us of his grace - the reformers called these the means of grace. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, reading the Word, prayer, fellowship, confession, church.

None of these save us - only faith in Jesus saves us. But these things are ways that God pours out encouraging grace to us as his children.

If I've got a flat tire, I go to the garage and hook up my air compressor and fill tire. I didn't fill the tire, I just used the proper means of channeling air into the tire.

That's what the means of grace are. They don't save us and we don't really do anything; but we use the God-given means to channel gospel truths of grace into our hearts and it fills us up and strengthens us.

So Jesus coming into the world gives us strength. Physical strength, maybe. But spiritual strength for sure.

## 2) God has judged us faithful **Read 12**

God judged Paul faithful. Which is pretty amazing if you think about Paul's life. Before his conversion Paul was a persecutor of Christians. I mean, he was on the way to lock people up in Damascus when he met Jesus on the road.

And yet he says God judged him faithful. Was he faithful? No. He wasn't faithful. But the wording here means that God counted him faithful anyway.

See when someone believes the gospel of Jesus, we become co-heirs with Christ. Think about that. What does Jesus rule over? Everything - like everything, everything. And we are joint heirs with him and will rule with him forever and ever. The Bible says we will judge angels.

I don't know what your resume looks like, but there's nothing on my resume that qualifies me for ruling the universe with Jesus. Or judging angels. If this were a job interview for that position I wouldn't even get a call back.

But God in his grace has judged every believer faithful. Not because we are, but because we've been made faithful by God. He keeps the amazing treasure of the gospel in us - in weak and fragile jars of clay . Why? To show his power.

Praise God he has judged us faithful.

## 3) Appointed us to service. **Read 12**

Paul says God appointed him to service. Specifically Paul was an elder and an apostle. This was a special office from God for the advancement of the gospel in the early church. And God blessed the preaching of Paul and his ability to start churches.

And while we're not apostles - there are no more apostles - if you are a follower of Jesus you have been appointed for service as well. **1 Cor. 12-14** talks about how every believer has the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit gives us a gift of service: maybe it's management, teaching, or encouragement, or service, or generosity.

Paul talks about how we are like different body parts: some are eyes, some are noses, some are ears, some are hands, some are bottoms - it's true look it up.

But every single Christian has been given spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit. And with those gifts we are to serve the church. We have been appointed to God's service. The moment we were saved he commissioned us to go and use our gifts for his glory. Not because we are especially talented or skilled but because in his grace he's invited us in. You say "Well, I'm no good" or "I don't even know what to do." That's okay.

You know how kids often want to help with making dinner or working on house projects? And usually help means “make it harder for the parent.” That’s kind of how it is with God. God could single handedly accomplish all ministry by just speaking it into existence. But he doesn’t, he includes us in the work. And amazingly he rewards us for that work as well.

He has appointed us all to service for his glory.

#### 4) Overlooks our sins. Read 12-13

Paul’s life before Christianity was not pretty. He was a Pharisee who boasted in his own accomplishments before God - he essentially tried to work for his salvation by being a good Jew. But his whole life was actually offensive to God. He was a blasphemer: cursing Jesus and cursing his people.

He was a persecutor: attacking the church. The very first Christian martyr - Stephen - was killed while Paul (then known as Saul) looked on in approval.

He was also an insolent opponent. Insolent means violent. That was Paul’s way of life toward Christians.

But God erased all that from his account. It disappeared. You ever think back to the sins you committed before you were saved? The stuff that’s hard to talk about and even think about? And wonder how in the world could God use you?

God doesn’t think about those things. Those things are gone. The memory of them completely erased.

Have you ever seen those old Soviet photos where they tried to erase people out of the photo? They tried to erase the memory, but they can’t? They didn’t have good photoshop so the guy is gone, but there’s still a shadow or a hand on someone’s shoulder, or something weird?

When God overlooks our sin, it’s not like a bad photoshop job where the past was mostly erased. It’s as though the past never existed.

We are new creations in Christ Jesus, the old has passed away, behold the new has come.

That’s what God has given us in Christ: he has overlooked all our sin. Past. Present. Future.

#### 5) Gave us mercy. Read 13

Paul says he was given mercy. Mercy is not getting what we deserve.

When I was in high school I got a ticket for speeding. I was going 15 over in a 55 zone. State Trooper pulled me over, didn’t even talk to me, just handed me the ticket. Someone told me I could go to the courthouse and talk to the judge and ask for lenience. So I did. The judge asked why he should give me any lenience and I said I didn’t deserve it. I was just hoping he would have mercy on me. And he did.

And that’s basically what happens in the gospel. When we come to God through faith in Jesus we are asking for pure mercy. We’re not making a deal with God “Hey God, I’ll do these works and you’ll give me forgiveness.” No, salvation is not based on our works as though we as filthy sinners could bargain with a holy God. No, it’s falling down on our face and begging God for pure mercy.

And you know what? God is in the business of mercy.

If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

He does that the first time we ask and he does it the millionth time we ask.

#### 6) Overflowed Grace to us Read 14

Grace and mercy are two sides of the same coin. Mercy is not getting what we do deserve. Grace is getting what we don’t deserve. Grace is simply a gift. It’s unmerited favor.

And through faith in Jesus God overflows his grace to us.

Have you ever had a falling out with someone? An argument or a fight? And then at some point you sort of patched it up. Like, you don't hate each other any more but you're not friends either?

God's not like that. Before we were saved we were enemies of God. His wrath was pointed at us like a nuclear weapon. And when he saved us, it's not like we just sort of patched things up and go our separate ways.

No, God's grace now overflows to us. You ever seen a little kid trying to carry a glass of milk from the counter to the table? And it's just spilling out everywhere making a mess on the floor? That's like God's grace toward us. It's so full and amazing it just overflows all over the place. It just keeps spilling out and spilling out and spilling out.

We have every grace he could possibly give us.

7) Specifically, what spills over for us is faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. **Read 14**

So what God has done here is filled Paul with 2 things: faith and love. In our analogy, the little cup that he's holding is filled with faith in Jesus and it's filled with love for Jesus.

So what God has poured into our hearts is actually the very faith we have that saved us. And what he has poured into our heart is the very love we have for Jesus.

Why do you love Jesus? Because God gave you a love for Jesus. We love him because what? He first loved us.

And why do we have faith in Jesus? Because he gave that to us too. God has overflowed our little cups with faith and love. And if you're in the faith God will continue to do that until he brings you home to glory.

8) Save sinners. **Read 15**

This is probably the verse in this passage we are most familiar with. This is the reason Christ Jesus came into the world - for our salvation. To save us.

Save us from what? When we talk about salvation we're talking about being rescued from some kind of real danger. What was that danger?

It was the real and eternal wrath of God. See, before someone is a Christian, they are enemies with God. And God is rightfully angry with them for their sin. We've violated his holy, perfect law. We've personally offended him. And what we deserve is eternal, conscious punishment in hell forever. God is rightly angry for our sins. We deserve the full blast of his eternal wrath.

And amazingly, what the Bible says is that God in his own grace sent his Son Jesus to save us from himself! God sent Jesus to take the very wrath we deserve from him. Jesus bears in his body the wrath of God the Father for all those who believe in him.

That's how he saves sinners. He rescues us from the wrath of God the Father.

If you've ever seen space shuttles on re-entry they have these heat shields. The amount of friction of recentering the atmosphere is so great that without these shields the shuttles would be disintegrated into bits in seconds. But these shields provide protection from the blazing hot blast of reentry.

That's what Jesus does: He stands between us and the blazing hot wrath of God. Through faith in Jesus, he fully absorbs the wrath we deserve and saves us.

That's a trustworthy saying. And he saves big sinners and little sinners alike. Whether you've got 5 million or 5 billion sins, the wrath of God is absorbed in Jesus through faith in Jesus.

What else has God done?

9) Displayed perfect patience. Read 16

This is so cool. God was patient with Paul. Very very patient. And I don't know about you, but God is patient with me.

**Ex. 34:6-7** The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Did you know God is slow to anger? That's another way to say patient. God doesn't have a short fuse. He's not a hothead. He is patient. In Hebrew the phrase for patience is literally "long of nose." When God is angry he is hot of nose - like a blast from a dragon.

But his patience is described as long of nose. It's like a drip of sweat rolling down his forehead, onto his nose, and if the drop falls off he'll burst. But he is long of nose, the drop just keeps rolling and rolling and very rarely falls off.

You know when we see God burst forth in anger in the Bible it's usually after a long, long, long time. Even toward his enemies he is patient.

How much more his children? He is patient with us.

10) He uses us as examples. Read 16

Paul says that God used him as an example of patience. God was going to show every person who would ever become a Christian just how patient he is by how he treated Paul. Paul was the chief of sinners, and God was patient anyway.

And actually God uses all of us as examples all the time. Our lives are no longer our own, they belong to God and God often displays what we go through for other people to benefit and grow.

How we succeed, how we fail, the trials we go through. Examples of suffering, faithfulness, patience, prayer, sorrow, joy, provision, parenting, marriage, work ethic, salvation. On and on.

When we become his children our lives are not our own. Our lives are his lives to be used however he wants them to be used. And often they are used as examples - and that's a good thing. We shouldn't hide our lives from other people. I can't tell you how often I've been blessed and encouraged by people sharing with me some private detail of their life - both positive and negative- because it gives me an example.

I think we might even do well to be just a little more open with people than we're comfortable, not in an effort to boast or "woe is me" but to potentially be examples of God's grace and patience toward us.

Once you're in the Kingdom, you no longer have any copyright privileges. God owns them all and will use us for his glory.

11) Eternal Life. read 16

God gives us eternal life. Life forever and ever. Usually when we think of eternal life, we think of living forever and never dying in heaven. And there's a sense in which that's true. We look forward to a day when there are no more tears or sorrows or death or pain or suffering.

But Jesus says in **John 17:3** that eternal life is knowing God and knowing Jesus Christ who God sent. Eternal life is actually a personal and loving knowledge of God.

People often talk about a personal relationship with God. I don't use that phrase very often but that really is the idea. It's not just knowing stuff or theology in general. But knowing and loving God like he's your best friend. It's delighting in him because of who he is and what he's done.

In the gospel, he's given us the greatest thing he ever could: himself! Access to him just like a little kid has access to his father.

There are times when my kids just wander over to me, crawl up on my lap and snuggle with me. If most of you did that we'd need to talk and probably have some kind of intervention. But not my kids.

But that's the access we have with God. We can go directly to him in prayer and in faith because we know him and he loves us more than any father or mother will love their child.

He's granted us that beautiful privilege.

12) Is a gift that Jesus doesn't give to us, but to his Father by what he's done for us: glory. **Read 17**

This is a doxology: an overflow of praise.

God is the King of the Ages - or King over all the Ages, he reigns forever and ever.

God is immortal - he lives forever.

God is invisible - we can't see him because he is spirit.

God is the only God , there are no other gods, only the one true and living God.

And to that God, we, along with our Savior Jesus, God we proclaim honor and glory forever and ever.

**Pray**