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“The Perspective of Paul”

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Many years ago before we had kids I got to spend time at the mall when Kelly would be shopping, not watching kids, but going into a bookstore and hanging out there, one of my favorite things to do.

One time I saw this book on the 100 greatest religious figures of history. Guess who the greatest religious figure of history was. No, it was not Jesus, He only finished number three. Number two was Mohammad and number one was Paul or the Apostle Paul.

I think from a completely secular point of view you can almost understand that. That what Paul did was take the teachings of Jesus and move them from a specific location throughout the entire civilized world. So Paul was a very significant figure in history.

Paul’s story we can find in the book of Acts, he gives his version of his story, his testimony if you will, in 1 Timothy 1:12-17. So we will spend some time reading this together.

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful, putting me into service; even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. 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. And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for 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."

That’s Paul’s version of his life, his testimony. Each of us have come to Christ in a different way and Paul certainly was dramatic in the way that he came to Christ. Timothy came in a different way and you come, if you are a believer, you come in a different fashion.

We all have a testimony and there’s a way of going about giving it. There are people who’ve taught this, this is how you give a personal testimony, first you say what your life was like and then you say what Christ did to bring you to Himself and then what your life is now. Well Paul doesn’t really follow this plan, does he? He starts out with the end, what Christ had done, had brought him to. There’s really no exact way to do this, there’s no this is the process you do to share what God has done in your life.

But it’s also interesting about not only how you go about sharing what God has done in your life, but even when to do this. Because this passage doesn’t just come up at a random place, it has a context and Paul gives this description of himself for a purpose. Paul is giving this as a contrast to what he wrote earlier to the certain men.

There were certain men that Timothy was urged by Paul to instruct them not to teach certain doctrine. What their doctrine was, we came to learn from the beginning of this chapter, was these myths that give rise to speculation. And these speculations concerned the Law and the teachings of

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the Law. They wanted to be teachers of the Law though they didn't understand these confident assertions that they were making.

Paul was there. If you are familiar with his story he was someone who was a teacher of the Law, he was a Pharisee, he called himself the Pharisee of the Pharisees, a very capable person teaching these sorts of things. But yet he now had received God's grace and wasn't that anymore. He wasn't making confident assertions, he wasn't pretending he would do that, he had been given God's grace and was now about something completely different. So in contrast to those certain men he was delivering God's grace in a different way.

So we will look at first the product of God's grace. Verse 12, Paul was a product of God's grace. He writes this *"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful, putting me into service."* God's grace showed itself in Paul's life. It strengthened Paul and he was thankful that he had been strengthened. As we are weak but God's grace strengthens us. We are not able to live on our own apart from his strength. In faith, in faithfulness, God's grace produces a faithfulness. Though God found him faithful, that faithfulness was not of Paul's doing but of God's grace in his life. Strength and faithfulness resulted in what? It resulted in service or ministry. God's grace in Paul's life produced ministry.

And this is something that should tie us all together. That each of us has a story. Hopefully, if we are believers, we have a testimony of how God has given His grace in our lives for the purpose of putting us into service. To help us to be able to be an encouragement and to minister to people around us, that is what He has called us for. He could have just taken us to Himself and to heaven, but He left us here.

In Philippians Chapter 1, Paul puts it, *"to be of fruitful service to those around us"* because it is far better personally to be with the Lord but to be of fruitful service to those around us, that is why we are still here. And that was why God imparted grace to Paul, so he could serve, and serve Him he did, aggressively. So much that he ranked number one in this guy's book many years ago. That's the product of God's grace and hopefully that's true in your life that the product of God's grace is ministry to others.

Then, there is the power of God's grace. We will look at the next verse, verse 13, *"even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief."* The power of God's grace enabled Paul to turn from these evil things to be a follower of Christ. That's His power to be that transformation, the power to make a blasphemer into one that praises God.

Paul was a blasphemer. That word means "one who slanders God, one who speaks falsely about God, who speaks evil about God." Paul was that, he slandered God. If you asked Paul before he was a Christian, are you blaspheming God? What would he have said? Would he have said, "Sure, yes I'm a blasphemer?" No, of course not. He would have been believing he was doing the right thing.

How many people are caught up in their sin, believing they are doing the right thing because they have been blinded? It is not uncommon for people to believe that they are doing the right things, serving God, to be really totally opposed to him. Paul was that, he was a blasphemer, slandering God. He was also a persecutor, the word "persecutor" here means one who hunts and he was hunting them down.

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If we read Luke's account of Paul in Acts 8:1, after the mob put Steven to death, in Chapter 7, Paul, or Saul as he was called before he knew Christ, Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. Then a great persecution arose in verse 3 and we find Saul ravaging the church. He began ravaging the church entering house after house. Not waiting for them to come to him, he was going to them, dragging off men and women (not even the women were safe), he put them into prison. In chapter 9 it tells us a little more about that, Acts 9:1, *"Now Saul still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest."* And, of course, the story goes that he was on his way to Damascus Acts 9:2, *"and asked for the letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."*

So Jesus reveals Himself dramatically to Paul. But in the process of that, Paul was in the business of persecuting, hunting the men and the women, tracking them down. He was also a violent aggressor. Violent in not only taking the initiative to attack but there's an attitude here that underlines this word for "violent aggressor." It's one who derives pleasure from hurting others. His attitude, his motivation here is he was enjoying himself in this. Hurting other people, this is the evil deeds of Paul's background and God's grace was so powerful that it could rescue even Paul, in his aggressive antagonism in attacking the church, to deliver him.

He describes himself one other way here doesn't he. Verse 1:13, *"even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief."* We find Paul was ignorant, he describes himself as ignorant.

That might even be a little surprising to you if you know much about Paul because you would not think he was ignorant. He was learner, he was very intelligent, he had an education in the Law and he knew the Scriptures well and he knew about what he was persecuting, too. This movement of Christ wasn't something off in the corner somewhere that people didn't know very much about and needed to go research. No, it was revolutionizing the Jewish world and Paul was in the business of attacking it and he knew what he was attacking.

So in what sense is he ignorant, this person, Paul? It wasn't in the sense of information but rather in his experience. Paul's ignorance was not informational it was rather experiential.

Let me try to explain this. He didn't lack knowledge about the gospel. I'm sure he knew what people were saying about Jesus. Just like people today know, many people, know about Jesus. They've heard the words of the gospel, maybe they've heard it from you, but they haven't heard it in a sense so they can understand it personally, experientially and come to grasp the significance of it. It's just words, information, data. Paul didn't lack the data but he lacked the experiential knowledge of it. To be able to appreciate it for what it is.

It was just words bouncing off his ears because he had not even considered it as being truthful, he rejected it out of hand. And many people today are rejecting it out of hand. They're ignorant, not in that they haven't heard it and they may even be able to explain it back to you, what you said, but they are ignorant in that they have just not really seen it as being significant. What about these people? They may be doing evil deeds like Paul. They may be attacking and hurting people. What do we think about them? Well, we need to have compassion for them.

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What is more significant than a person's evil deeds is how much truth they have rejected. Like Jesus said about the people who were putting him to death, *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing."* They may have seen Jesus but they didn't know who He was in any kind of experiential way, so they were acting in ignorance.

We find that in the words of Peter in Acts 3:17 as well. They acted in ignorance. Luke 12 talks about people who are deserving of a flogging but receive less because they had less information. Having information and being able to see it as being truthful and then walking away from it and rejecting it is a serious thing.

I'll read you a passage in Hebrews 6:4-6, *"For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame."*

Now we can't really know when that happens in a person's life, only God knows when that happens in a person's life. They have come to the knowledge of God and are getting all the revelation they're going to get and they say "I'm going to live for myself." At that point it's not that God can't do more but, what more is He going to do? He has revealed Himself to them and they can see the significance of God and they walked away.

It's like the unpardonable sin in Matthew 12 where people have seen the works of Jesus around them and what do they do? They assign the works of Jesus to the works of the devil. Well, what more is Jesus going to do? They've hardened their hearts like Pharaoh who saw a miracle after a miracle and he hardened his heart and eventually we see the phrasing change in Exodus to "God hardened his heart." God confirmed the decision that he has made.

Those are the people that are very difficult to reach with the truth of Jesus. It's not the people that are committing evil deeds and who are corrupt and are very hurtful. Those are the people that you can have sympathy towards because they are ignorant and they are acting in unbelief. But the people that know and have experiential knowledge and have turned away, they can be very hard to reach. When that is, I don't know, you don't know, but those people are difficult.

So, see the people who are like Paul, committing evil deeds, as an opportunity. As people who need the gospel rather than people that should be avoided because they might be hurtful. Paul was that, he was an aggressive blasphemer that persecuted, but yet God's grace and power changed him.

Then we move on to the next verse. We see God's provision of grace, verse 14, *"and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus."* This provision is so abundant that Paul puts a compound word together to intensify this provision. *God's grace abounds over and beyond*, it's superabundant.

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You, if you're a believer, have all the grace you need. You have been fully outfitted, you are fully equipped, you have more than you need to do what God wants you to do. You are fully supplied and then some.

It is superabundant, for what? For faith and love. Faith, knowing God and trusting Him, in whatever these circumstances are in your life that you have to ask for wisdom in and trust that God's will be done. You have the ability, the grace poured out in your life to do that, it exists. And to love, loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself. You have the grace in Christ Jesus to live a life of love and serve others. You have that, it has been poured out to you abundantly. It's a matter of walking in the grace that has been given to you. It is amply provided for you if you trust in Christ for salvation. That's God's provision.

Next we will look at the people, verse 15, the people of God's grace, there are really two groups, Jesus and all the rest of us. *"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."* This is a trustworthy statement, that's like Jesus words in the gospel, *truly, truly I say to you*. Paul puts it this way, *"it's a trustworthy statement."* You can take it to the bank, it's worthy of full acceptance, complete acceptance by everybody.

And what's the statement. The statement is this, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. This verse communicates the gospel. If you want a verse that communicates the gospel here it is. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, that's the message of the Bible.

Sometimes its fun to ask people what do you think the message of the Bible is? This is it, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. All of it surrounds that truth and that gospel right here has all the components in it.

We have the person of Christ right here for us. Christ Jesus came into the world. He came into the world. He took the initiative, it wasn't the people of the world felt like they were deficient and needed some extra help, so they invited Jesus. No, He took the initiative on His own account to come. He came from outside to come and dwell among us. It shows His preexistence, that He existed before and came to us. It shows even His electing, saving grace, that He took the initiative on His account to save us. He came, and He is the acting force.

So we find something about the person of Christ, Christ Jesus. Even the in name Christ Jesus, Christ is a title, Messiah. He is the Messiah of Israel. The sent One of God, the prophesied One, Christ the Messiah. Jesus the Savior, He came to save. It's what Jesus means, God's salvation, and that's what the verse says, to save sinners, the work of Christ, that's what he came to do, give His life for our sins.

So He didn't save us to have a happy life and have an abundant life so we may have an abundant life because He has given Himself to us. But He came to save us from our sins, that's His work to deliver us from our sinfulness.

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And that brings the need of man. Apart from people understanding the need of man they're not going to need the work of Christ. They don't see themselves as having a need, they are not going to be responding to this offer of salvation. So the need of man is here as well, we are sinners.

We are so sinful that Paul can say this about himself, *"to save sinners among whom I am foremost of all."* He's the chief. He's first place in his view. He is more sinful than anyone else in his view.

Well, this shows us something, his description of himself as foremost shows us a couple of things. What does it show us? It first of all shows us his humility, his ability to see himself well. If I were to ask you before you came today to list the most evil people of all time, would Paul rise up on the list? Probably not, but in his list he did. I think that shows humility and accurately so. I don't think he was blowing smoke here, I think he was being as honest as he could and he did see himself as foremost of all.

How do you see yourself? One way to test whether people are truly repentant is how do they see themselves. Do they see their sins as being other people's fault, or "I have problems and mine is I'm about 50/50, half the people are worse than me and half the people are better than me," or do you see yourself as being sinful?

Well, let me help you to see yourself as a little more sinful. Paul could have had this attitude himself: He could have said, "Other people came before me, I was there when Steven was stoned but I was just holding the coats. It wasn't until later that other people encouraged me along and I got swept up in the whole thing." But he didn't defend himself in that sort of way.

Your testimony may be, "Well, I grew up in a Christian home, I became a Christian at age 4, yeah I threw a toy at my brother, but I really didn't get into all these evil things." Let me ask you this, let's say God didn't put His grace in your life in the way He did and you would have lived your selfishness out to it's degree?

I can even say this in my life, I didn't grow up in Christian home. I didn't become a Christian until I was 19 years old, but the set of circumstances I was in somewhat prevented me from living out a life of wanton sin as much as I would have liked to. So, it could have gotten a lot worse but God's grace protected me from living a life quite as painful as I would have liked to be. I was enough of a pain, it could have been a lot worse but God protected me.

And you too, it could have been a lot worse but God's grace has protected you to some degree. So I think if you were true about yourself you could see that your evil desires, left unchecked and not protected by God's grace and the people surrounding you, would have led you to be the foremost of all sinners right up there with Paul. Because in and of yourself you are no more selfish or less selfish than Paul or me. We are all evil and we need salvation and when we see ourselves that way it's a wonderful thing. It doesn't depreciate our self-esteem and make us sad, it encourages us that God's grace has strengthened us and we can be so thankful for this that it will motivate us to love others and love God. It's a wonderful thing to see ourselves humbly.

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In addition to Paul's humility it also shows the seriousness of Paul's sin. And when we do things like attack God's work it's a serious thing, and Paul, I think, saw that as such, the things he was engaged in were truly evil. And the things that we do that hurt other people are serious. But fortunately we have a Savior who came to us to die and deliver us from sin.

Verse 16, *"And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life."* And so this statement about the purpose of God's grace is a little different than what many Christians might say the purpose of God's grace in their life is. Many people might think the purpose of God's grace in their life is to save them, is to give them an abundant life, to deliver them from sin and make them happy.

But God's grace is bigger than that. That is an element of the product of God's grace but God's grace has a purpose beyond you and beyond Paul. Paul received mercy in order that Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience. The purpose of God's grace is ultimately to glorify God, not us. God's grace is ultimately about glorifying Him, not glorifying us.

Yes, it's wonderful that a by-product of God's grace is all of what it brings to us. But our life is to glorify Him and Paul's life was to demonstrate God's perfect patience. God was patient with Paul's sinfulness and even though he was the foremost of all, He delivered him.

It's interesting when Paul says he was the foremost of all, did you notice that, he didn't say he was the foremost of all, he said *"I am the foremost of all."* He had a perspective of himself that was that's who he was. Not just in the past but even in the present. Who we are needs to be humble before the Lord so that we can glorify Him rather than ourselves. The purpose of God's grace is all about Him.

So when we, like Paul, share with people what God has done in our lives, what should we do? Should we talk about ourselves or should we talk about God and what He has done for us? One way to glorify God is to share our testimony and to share our testimony with people that can connect to us, that can see how their life would be similar to our life, but ultimately it is to praise God, to glorify God, to lift Him up.

And that's why you have verse 17, which is the praise of God's grace *"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."* Paul's life in the dramatic change as never before in history was to praise God. Now this verse is interesting. Who is the King here? Well, from the context we are talking about Christ Jesus throughout here and thanking Christ, so verse 17 may point to Him. As you look at some other verses it instructs us a little more.

At the end of 1 Timothy, chapter 6, we will learn that the King, I think, is Jesus. Chapter 6:14-16 says this from Paul to Timothy, *"That you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time - He who is the blessed and only sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see."* To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

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Really, there are pronouns here. I know the NIV puts the name God in there and literally there are only pronouns here and you have to ask what are the pronouns referring to. Who is the King of kings and Lord of lords? Well, certainly this directs itself toward God but there's another verse I'd like to point you to. Revelation 17:14 says this, *"These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful."* Verse 16 of Revelation chapter 19, *"And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords.'" So, we can say this accurately. That isn't quite as interpretative, that's really straight forward. Jesus in Revelation has that title King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the King.*

Now I can't be so dogmatic to say I know that's what Paul had on his mind in verse 17, I just think it fits with the context but what we do know is that title King is applied to Jesus in the Scripture and rightfully so, He has authority. Matthew 28:18, *"all authority has been given to Christ in heaven and on earth."* He is the King. This description of Christ shows His deity. We find His deity, He is eternal, He never started, He will never finish, He lives forever, eternal.

But don't get that confused with immortal. Another word for immortal is incorruptible. That means there's no decay, it's constant. God is eternal and the Lord Jesus is never to undergo decay.

God is invisible as well. He is invisible. He is invisible in this sense, yes He reveals Himself and we see him at certain times in history, but in Himself He is invisible to us. Apart from His grace revealing Himself to us we cannot see Him. You can undertake any research that you want but apart from His revelation we cannot find Him. He must reveal Himself to us. That is His character.

We see His character and we see what He is due. Because of who Christ is He is worthy of eternal praise. He is worthy of praise, verse 17, *"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."* Because of who He is and what He has done for us. So as you share with people about what God has done in your life, this is to praise God so that others can praise God, as we can praise God because to Him is the honor and glory due forever and ever.

Let's bow together in a word of prayer. Lord, we thank You for delivering us, for rescuing us from sin. We thank You that even though we are sinful and rebellious You have given us the grace to see You. We pray that won't be something we will take lightly but we will embrace You fully with our whole heart and we will endure. We thank You that You are faithful and that even when we are faithless You remain faithful and we can indeed walk with You and You have opened up the door for that. Lord, we pray that we can be able to represent You well about what has gone on in our lives so that we can connect with people who need You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.