

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- Sunday 16th June 2024
am TITLE: "Mercy to the chief of sinners" TEXT: 1 Timothy 1 v 12-17
Series: "Guarding the deposit" Pt 3:
Scripture references from the ESV

1 Timothy 1:12-17 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷ To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

We can ask the question: **'Why me?'** in one of two ways. It can come from a place of suffering or a place of blessing.

- When you are ill, made redundant or struggling with a broken relationship, you might ask **'why me?'** with the feeling that you deserve better than what you have got.
- When something happens that surprises you, such as getting a job after you had messed up the interview, then you ask that same question with an awareness that you did not deserve what you got.

When we feel we deserve better, the result is bitterness toward God, envy of those who are not suffering as you are, and other God dishonouring emotions.

When we ask **'why me?'** from the place of awareness that we don't deserve this, the result is amazement at God's grace and mercy, thankfulness and joy in God and a heart that reaches out to those who do not have the same blessings.

Paul demonstrates this latter principle as he shares his testimony (above), giving God, not himself, all the glory.

- He begins with thanks to Christ (v12), ends with praise to Christ (v17) and declares Christ's salvation in the middle (v15).
- It is Christ's mercy and grace that cause Paul to give thanks and praise.

Paul's testimony is a story of mercy and grace to the chief of sinners.

Paul did not get what he deserved (that shows mercy) but did get what he did not deserve (that shows grace). His testimony is one of joy in Christ, despite all that he suffered and continued to suffer, in terms of persecution, beatings and imprisonment. Paul was very aware that:

He did not deserve the salvation blessings

As a result, when he asked the question '**Why me?**', his response was one of praise and thanks to Christ Jesus, and of joy in the face of suffering.

- Is that how you would like to be? How is it possible? It requires a healthy awareness of your sin, and a healthy awareness of God's grace

Unhealthy awareness of sin results in either despair or pride. You might feel that God can never accept you because you are such a dreadful person, and all you can see is your sin. Alternatively, your testimony might be so full of your past life of sin, that you are almost gloating over it. That unhealthy awareness comes out of a failure to rest in the grace of God.

We need both a healthy awareness of our sin and a healthy awareness of God's grace.

1. **We need a healthy awareness of our sin.** Paul never forgot what he once was (v13). At one time, he had been ignorant of who Jesus Christ is. He did not believe Jesus was the Messiah whom God had sent to save us from sin. He believed that the way to be right with God was through law-keeping. Out of his ignorance and unbelief,
 - he spoke out against Jesus - he was a blasphemer of God
 - he arrested believers and cast his vote to have them executed – he was a persecutor of God's people
 - he set his heart against the gospel message – he was an insolent opponent to the gospel

Before Paul met Christ, his life was one of hostility towards God, though, in his ignorance and unbelief, he thought he was doing God a favour by persecuting Christians. In fact, he was guilty of blasphemy.

Now, however, everything is different, but he never forgot where he came from.
He did not gloat in it,
or despair because of it, but

He did have a healthy awareness of his past sin

Paul's description of himself as the **foremost sinner** does **not** mean that, with prophetic insight, he could see that he had committed worse sins than anyone else ever had or would. He does not say I **WAS**, but I **AM** the foremost sinner (v15). His awareness of the grace of God brought him to that place. The grace of God never leaves us feeling proud or despairing.

**The grace of God results in a deepening sense of
the depravity of sin from which we have been saved.**

- Grace does not lead to us comparing our own sin with that of others
- Grace does lead us to become aware of the ugliness and vileness of sin against God

Although Christ changes us so that we find ourselves doing fewer bad things, at the same time

**We find ourselves being more aware of
the sinfulness of sins that at one time would not have bothered us.**

A person might have been covetous, always wanting more and happy to spend without considering the cost, maybe even going into debt to get what they wanted. When God saves them, that person finds that the longing in their heart for stuff is replaced by love for Christ. They can say that formerly they were a lover of things and self-indulgent but now the trajectory of their life is towards satisfaction in Christ alone. However, they also find that they have an increasing hatred of the covetous thoughts that still come into their mind. Although those thoughts are now quickly banished before the Lord, they are still grieved to have even had the thought.

Grace has taught their heart to fear.

If you have a healthy awareness of sin:

- you will have a tender conscience when it comes to the smallest of sins, and say with Paul: **I feel as if I am the foremost sinner.**

- You will be aware of what God has saved you from, and have a growing awareness of the sinfulness of all sin

That healthy awareness of sin will not lead you to pride or despair,

but, instead, will lead you to joy in God's grace and greater transformation

- 2. We need a healthy awareness of God's grace that is completely intertwined with our awareness of sin**

Paul tells us twice that he received mercy (v13,16). The sins he had committed, in his ignorance and unbelief, (v13) deserved eternal death under God's Old Testament law. He did not get eternal death.

God showed him mercy because God is a God of mercy

Instead, he got everything he did not deserve (v14). God's grace swept into his life like a mighty river, bringing him two things that he lacked and that were totally undeserved:

Faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour from sin

Love for Christ and Christ's people.

Grace brought these gifts to Paul and transformed him

- His ignorance and unbelief about Jesus were replaced with faith in Jesus
- His persecution of Christ's church was replaced with love for Christ and his church

The transformation did not stop there. Paul speaks (v11) of the **gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted**, and goes on to speak of being appointed to the service of King Jesus (v12). He was entrusted with the very gospel that he sought to silence.

Paul's speech was transformed too. Instead of blasphemy, what comes out of his mouth is praise (v17).

This is extreme grace.

Jesus Christ took his enemy and transformed him into a loyal servant

Do you have this healthy awareness of God's grace? Do you recognise that God's grace has brought you faith in Christ and love for him and his people, along with a desire to serve him and them and a heart of joy-filled praise for Christ?

Healthy awareness of grace will give you a healthy awareness of sin

With that twin awareness, there will be transformation in our lives, so that we become more and more like Jesus.

We do not become more like Jesus by keeping the law.

We become more like Jesus because of grace in our lives.

From the overflow of praise in our hearts because we know God's grace and mercy, two actions will come.

a) **We will guard the gospel.** Paul shows how it is possible for God to show sinners mercy and grace (v15). Paul, the blasphemer, was not given the sentence of eternal death, because Christ had been sentenced to death as a blasphemer in his place. The religious leaders, in ignorance and unbelief, failed to see Jesus for who he was

The eternal Son of God

They crucified him for blasphemy, but the blasphemy for which he died was Paul's and ours in our failure to honour Christ as God. With the penalty for sin satisfied by Christ's death on the cross, God is able to show grace and mercy to us. That amazing message about an amazing Saviour of grace and mercy, when we truly grasp it, leads to transformation and praise even in suffering.

- No matter what is going on in our lives, we are able to ask the question 'Why me?' from the place of undeserved blessing.

God's grace and mercy has turned you from an enemy of Christ into his willing servant.

That is so precious.

It is both life changing and Christ exalting.

When people want to change the message by taking away the glory of God's grace and exalting humans, or by making it appear that Christ wants us to be healthy and wealthy rather than making us like himself, then we are to silence those false teachers.

We are to guard the amazing message with which we, the church, have been entrusted by Christ

b) **We are to guard the message by proclaiming the gospel.** This message is for the world, not for a limited audience (v15). Paul's healthy awareness of sin and grace did not just lead him to praise. It gave him a heart of anguish for those who were lost. **I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.** ³ **For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my**

kinsmen according to the flesh. (Romans 9:2-3). Paul's awareness of what Christ had done for him led him to have a heart to see others saved, so that he travelled the known world declaring that

What God had done for him, God could do for them also

- This gives us a challenge.

We need to tell others about Christ Jesus who came into the world to save them. When we meet with family, friends and neighbours we need to tell them about God's mercy, that keeps us from getting what we deserve, and God's grace, that gives us what we don't deserve.

Have you perhaps understood that you do not have this healthy awareness of sin and of grace? Do you realise that you are not saved, though it is not because of ignorance since you have read and heard the gospel.

It is your failure to believe, and an unwillingness to entrust yourself to Christ, that is keeping you separate from God.

- Now is the time to turn to him and be saved.

You belong to the world to which he came to bring salvation, and you are not so bad that he cannot save you. Paul is the example of Christ's ability to save, no matter what you are and what you have done. The river of God's grace that swept faith and love into Paul's heart is still flowing, and it is available for you.

**When you believe and entrust yourself to Jesus Christ,
you too will experience this grace of faith and love and the healthy awareness of sin and
grace.**

You will find yourself offering up joy-filled praise and be able to sing from your heart, with all God's people:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise