

Sermon

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation this morning is the Epistle of Saint Paul, his first letter to Timothy, chapter one verses five through seventeen.

Boys and girls, I pray that you are having a joyous day pondering the wonderful news we just heard. What news is that? That “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (v 15). To save sinners? That’s not what we expect. Christ Jesus came into the world to condemn sinners. That’s what we expect. Christ Jesus came into the world to destroy sinners. That’s what we deserve. Christ Jesus came into the world to punish sinners. That’s what we think. Christ Jesus came into the world to teach sinners how no longer to be sinners, by being nice to one another. That’s how we act. But this is not what the text says: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Yes,

CHRIST JESUS SAVES SINNERS. PONDER THIS WONDEROUS NEWS AS YOU HEAR THE REST OF THE SERMON. YOU MAY GO BACK TO YOUR SEATS AND THOSE WHO LOVE YOU.

I. We are Sinners

Which leaves us only one thing to do: be a sinner.

This doesn’t seem like a particularly difficult task. After all, all of us sin. All of us break the Ten Commandments. Paul, in this letter to Timothy, runs through the Commandments, showing what sinners look like. They are unholy and profane, striking father and mother, murderers, sexually immoral, homosexuals, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and so on (vv 9–10). This is I. This is you. It might be possible that you’ve held back your hand from

these sins, perhaps your lips, but your heart and mind are constantly bent toward sin.

Remember how Jesus shows this to us? To be angry is to commit murder (Mt 5:22); to look with lust is to commit adultery (Mt 5:28). We have these two great tables staring us down: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mk 12:30–31). Which of us can check these off the list? Do the dishes, check. Take out the trash, check. Love the Lord with every ounce of my being, check? I’m afraid not.

Which means that you are a sinner, and this is good, remember? Because that’s who Christ Jesus came to save: sinners. “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (v 15). “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Mt 9:12). Jesus didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. But who is so healthy that he or she doesn’t need a doctor? Who is so righteous that he doesn’t need a Savior, that she doesn’t need Jesus?

This is where we get to the difficulty. The Pharisees Jesus is talking to (in Matthew 9) are just as sinful as you and I, but they don’t know it. They think they are righteous, that they are well, that they need no help, no Savior, and this is trouble. This is what Paul describes in our own text today, “Certain persons . . . have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions” (vv 6–7).

We are sinners, but we hate to admit it. Our old Adam, that sinful flesh that hangs around our neck, hates to admit our sin. “Sure, I’ve made mistakes. I’ve messed up, but everyone makes

mistakes. To err is human. Nobody's perfect." This is the soothing confession of our sinful flesh. "I've tried my best." But you haven't, have you? And just because everyone else has messed up doesn't make it okay with God. He is holy; he doesn't grade on a curve. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23), but our flesh clings to the illusion of its own goodness with a death grip, like a cat at bath time with claws sunk into the carpet. To confess that we are sinners, to acknowledge this, is death to the old man, but this is what we're after. The cure only makes sense after the diagnosis.

Imagine that some guy comes up to you and tells you to take a pill. "It's going to make all your hair fall out; you're going to lose your appetite; you'll have to quit working for a few weeks because this pill will make you so sick." You'd run from this guy . . . and call the police! But imagine that this guy is your doctor, and he's just given you the bad news that you have cancer. The diagnosis is bad, but we've caught it in time so that the chemo pills can take care of it. Now you don't run from him. You stay. You take the pills. You pay this man thousands of dollars! You rejoice in the cure because you know the sickness, the alternative. What a difference the diagnosis makes.

We are sinners. That is our diagnosis: poor, miserable sinners. Paul tells us, "The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and the disobedient, of the ungodly and sinners" (v 9). We have broken God's Law and stand deserving of his judgment, his wrath. And when we are sinners, when we acknowledge that nothing good dwells in us, that we have deserved God's anger because of what we've done and because of who we are, then the cure comes breaking over us with light and joy and peace.

II. So we are sinners saved by Christ Jesus

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (v 15). “Hey, I’m a sinner! Jesus came to save me!” Yes! And save you he does: his agony in your place, his death for your life. His blood like a flood washing away your sin, your fear of death, your condemnation, your breaking of the Law. All of this comes to you through his cross.

Paul was bold to confess his sins. In our text, he calls himself the “foremost” of sinners (v 15). In his letters, he boasts of his weakness, of his sins. Paul’s companion and friend Luke recorded in Acts how Paul had overseen the brutal murder of Stephen and how Paul had obtained permission to trouble the Christians in Damascus, throwing them, even the mothers and children, into prison for believing in Jesus. Paul makes no attempt to hide his sin; he is a sinner, a sinner with a Savior. Paul knows the horrendous depth of his own sin, but this, for Paul, simply means that he knows all the better the height of Jesus’ love. “But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost [sinner], Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (v 16). The ultimate sinner became the ultimate saint; God’s greatest enemy became His finest servant. Somewhere between these extremes fall all the rest. In studying Paul’s pattern, Christians can therefore learn about themselves.¹ Sins forgiven by the precious blood of Jesus Christ that we might share that forgiveness with those around us, as we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Help us as we have been forgiven much to forgive much in others.

¹ Litfin, A. D. (1985). [1 Timothy](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 733). Victor Books.

Your sin can't stand in the way. Your death can't stand in the way. Your trouble can't separate you from him. Your Savior is Jesus, the one who came to save sinners, who came to save you. "To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (v 17).

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.