

Since Jesus Came Into My Life  
1 Timothy 1:12-17  
September 11, 2016

*I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 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. 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. To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Paul spent three years preaching in the city of Ephesus. At the end of those three years, Paul left that church in the hands of a young preacher named Timothy. After Paul's departure, Timothy had his share of problems. He faced false teachers in the church, false doctrine, disorder in worship, materialism, and a lack of qualified leaders.

On top of all of that, some people considered Timothy too young to hold the office of the pastor. Timothy was probably around 30 years old. Greek culture didn't accept a man as being mature until he was at least 40.

Timothy certainly had a lot on his plate. Paul wrote this letter to encourage the young pastor. He wanted Timothy to remain faithful to his calling and to grow in the Lord in spite of all the opposition he was facing.

To help Timothy understand what God can do in a person, Paul uses himself as an example. He tells Timothy, "Look what has happened to me since Jesus came into my life." Paul knew that if Timothy could see where Paul started and where he ended up, there would be no doubt about what Jesus could do in Timothy's life.

Today, we are going to take Paul's testimony and apply it to our lives. We need to fully understand that what God did in and through Paul he can do in and through us.

**Paul had a real sinner's testimony.** By his own admission he left no commandment unbroken. He was a blasphemer because he bad-mouthed the ministry of Jesus. In denying Jesus, Paul failed to love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Paul was a violent man. He willfully persecuted and executed his fellow Jewish people for the crime of being a Christian. In his actions toward others, he failed to love his neighbor as himself.

As religious as Paul claimed to be, he was a sinner to his very core. We are no better. There is nothing we can do to erase the stain of sin that covers our souls. In our sinful nature we all, like Paul, stand guilty before God.

Why did Paul do the things he did? According to the text, Paul claims he acted in ignorance. He's not making an excuse. Before he believed, Paul didn't understand the way of salvation. He was trying to earn his way to heaven. Paul honestly thought God would be happy with him if he stomped out this new Christian religion. Paul didn't see the truth until Jesus opened his eyes.

No sinner can see his or her sins until the Holy Spirit gives them the gift of faith. A key word there is "gift." Never forget that faith is God's good gift; it's not something you buy; it's not something you can earn; and it certainly isn't something you deserve.

Paul called himself the worst of all sinners. He meant that before Jesus drew him to faith, he was as evil as a human being could get. And even after his conversion, Paul was still a sinner to the core, but now he was saved by grace.

**Paul also had the testimony of a saint.** He says that his conversion was the result of two great gifts – mercy and grace. In his mercy, God didn't condemn Paul to an eternity of suffering in Hell, which is what he deserved. God gave him the salvation that he didn't deserve. It was God's mercy that kept Paul safe when he was doing everything in his power to stop the message of the Gospel.

It was God's grace that confronted Paul with his sin and saved his soul. Paul says God showered grace on him abundantly. That means that God poured out more grace than what was needed. God's grace is greater than all the sin the world can generate.

Notice this. Paul says he was shown mercy. In the Greek, "shown mercy" is in the passive voice. That means that Paul didn't find mercy, mercy found him. That means Paul didn't deserve mercy, but he received mercy anyway.

We have all received the same mercy and grace that Paul received. None of us earned it. None of us deserve it. But it's ours, just the same. Funny thing about mercy and grace – they're both not fair. We can't "out sin" God's grace and mercy, and please don't try.

When God's grace came into Paul's life, it brought with it faith and love. When Paul was saved he was able to believe what he had formerly denied. When Paul experienced God's grace, he was able to love people he had always hated.

God's grace has the same impact on people today. When God's grace floods your life, you see the truth about God and Satan, about sin and salvation. When God's grace floods your life, you see all humanity as one family and everyone else as your brother or sister.

**Paul gives us the testimony of a servant.** He says that God put him to the work of ministry because God knew he would be faithful and trustworthy. Paul didn't choose to

go into the ministry, God called him there. Once God called Paul to the ministry, Paul served faithfully to the glory of God.

God calls all of his people to a life of ministry. Not all our ministries are the same, but we are all called. There is no special group of people who have been called to salvation, but are not called to take the Gospel message to the world. Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations is the marching orders for all Christians.

However, you're not qualified to tell the Gospel story, right? Neither was Paul when God called him. Paul says God gave him the strength to do the job he was given. That's another way of saying God gave Paul the words, the courage, and the opportunities he needed to be a minister of the Gospel.

Please understand this, Paul did not do the things he did because he was a great preacher or teacher. Paul did not do the things he did because he was super smart. Paul did not do the things he did because of his natural abilities. Paul did all the things he did because the power of God was in him.

You don't need to attend a seminary in order to tell someone that Jesus loves them enough to die for them. You don't need a Master of Divinity degree to explain to someone that Jesus has paid for their sins and heaven is theirs if they just believe. God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called.

**Paul's testimony is also a showpiece.** God rained down mercy and grace on Paul in order to use Paul's life as a picture of what God can do. Paul's life shows the world how patient and loving God can be. If God can, and would, save a person with Paul's resume, God can and will save anyone else.

Paul's life also shows the path to salvation. That path isn't in blinding lights and voices from heaven. It's not in doing all the right things, praying all the right prayers, singing all the right songs. It's not in speaking in tongues or seeing visions. The pathway to salvation, the path that Paul followed, is faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Incidentally, Paul isn't the only one with a showpiece testimony. God has also saved you and me. Which of us, on our own, is good enough for heaven? Which of us has never broken every one of God's commandments? Which of us doesn't deserve an eternity in Hell? But God has saved us, and that says something special to the world.

Verse 17 of our reading is Paul's testimony of worship: *To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen* (1 Ti 1:17 ESV).

In these verses, Paul remembers who and what he was before Jesus took hold of his life. Having done that, he can't contain his worship. He bursts into a doxology of praise to the glory of God. Paul takes the credit for the change in his life and he puts it exactly where it belongs – at the feet of God.

Paul is more than an example for Timothy to follow, he's an example for our lives, too. Every Christian needs to remember what they were before Jesus came into their life. They need to remember how Jesus remains with them, especially in those times when they turn their back on Jesus. They need to remember where Jesus is taking them – into paradise to be with him forever.

When we think about all that Jesus has done for us, we join Paul in praising the God of all mercy and grace. And, as we lift our voices to worship our King, we use our lives as examples of what our loving God can do for everyone.