

## “Christ Jesus Came to Save Sinners”

(1 Timothy 1:12-17 – Pentecost 17 – October 5, 2025)

1 Timothy 1:12-17 – <sup>12</sup>*And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, <sup>13</sup>although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. <sup>14</sup>And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. <sup>16</sup>However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. <sup>17</sup>Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Dear fellow sinners, who have been saved by the grace of God in Christ Jesus:

*“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”* What a profound truth this is, revealed to us at the heart of all Scripture in the Gospel. Why did God send His Son down from His eternal heavenly glory into this fallen world? Was it for people who were pretty good natured, who for the most part did what was right in the sight of God and just needed a little help from Jesus to save them? No, Jesus came to save guilty sinners – in fact, the very worst. It was for the chief of sinners that the Son of God descended in our flesh, to suffer a most horrible death on a cross, to pay with His own blood to redeem us from our fallen sinful condition.

*“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”* These are the apostle Paul’s words, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Can we say the same? Yes, by God’s revelation in the Gospel we say: **“Christ Jesus Came to Save Sinners.”**  
**1) Chief of sinners though I be... 2) Jesus is my gracious Savior!**

### **1) Chief of sinners though I be...**

Paul knew his own sinfulness. As he looked back on his life, he knew it was only by the grace of God that he had been saved, for there was nothing good in him that merited God’s favor. Indeed, there was much that merited God’s punishment. He says: *“I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man.”* Before he became the Apostle Paul, he was the Pharisee Saul. At that time, he had taken great pride in thinking he was living the most righteous life, obeying all God’s Law and Commandments, doing everything needed to win God’s favor. Yet he was blind to his true sinful condition. In his unbelief and ignorance, he had been *“a blasphemer,”* speaking evil against the Lord Jesus Himself. In his misplaced zeal, he had even

become “*a persecutor*” of the church, relentlessly going after Jesus’ followers, breathing out murderous threats against them, binding them and dragging them off to prison. He was “*an insolent man,*” violent and hateful, casting his vote for the death of believers (Acts 9:1-2; 26:10-11).

During one of his campaigns to arrest believers at Damascus, the Lord Himself confronted Saul along the road in a blinding light, saying: “‘*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting’*” (Acts 9:4). For to hurt even the least of Jesus’ brethren is to hurt Him (Matthew 25:40, 45). As the Lord confronted Saul with the light of His truth, Saul’s eyes were blinded, but he saw his truly lost and sinful condition. Despite all boasting in his own righteousness, he knew the Lord could judge him as the guilty sinner he was and send him into the eternal death and darkness of hell.

We might be tempted to point at someone like Saul and say, “I can see why he called himself the chief of sinners. He did some pretty bad things. But I’m not like that. I’ve lived a pretty good life, as a loving family member, a faithful church goer, a law-abiding citizen. I don’t know if I could ever call myself the worst of sinners.” Maybe we reserve that kind of language for those who commit violent crimes or live grossly immoral lifestyles, who may seem too far gone in their ways to be saved.

But like Paul, do we know how deeply our own sinful nature corrupts us? We can only rightly know from Scripture. It reveals that we all have inherited the same sinful nature as fallen children of Adam (John 3:6; Romans 5:12). So “*there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). No one can claim, “My sinful nature is better, or less corrupt, than yours!” In our sinful condition, there was nothing we could do to come to God or to please Him; even our most righteous acts were corrupted by sin (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:10-12).

In Matthew 15:19, Jesus described actual sins coming from this sinful nature: “*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.*” We may not have joined Saul in blaspheming the Lord; but how many times have the lips that praised Him in worship dishonored His name by cursing, swearing, and unclean talk? We may not have joined Saul in persecuting and pursuing others to imprison them; but how often have we relentlessly pursued others by false witness, gossip, or slander, to hurt and imprison them with a bad reputation? We may not have joined Saul in breathing murderous threats against others and casting our votes for their death; but how many times have we harbored angry, unforgiving, and hateful thoughts and feelings against others, which God equates with the sin of murder (1 John 3:15)?

We may know certain outward sins of other people and judge them as horrible. But when we examine our own sinful condition under the glaring light of God's Law, we know our own sins far more. In fact, as repentant believers, the harder we fight the daily battle against sin, the more clearly we see and feel our own sinful condition. As the apostle Paul confessed in Romans 7:22-25: *"I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"*

## **2) Jesus is my gracious Savior!**

Thanks be to the God of all mercy; we have the gracious answer in His Gospel! *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."* While we were still lost in our ignorance and unbelief, living in hatred and enmity against God, He still loved us and sent His Son to save us. On the cross, Jesus became as the chief of sinners; for He took the sins of whole world on Himself (2 Corinthians 5:21). He took all our sins that proceed from the heart in thought, word, and deed. He took all our sins by which we have ever dishonored His name, and by which we have ever hated, hurt, and defamed others. He suffered and died to satisfy divine justice and free us from all condemnation. Then He rose from the dead as proof that it is finished. In Christ, God justifies us; He forgives all our sins and counts Jesus' righteousness to us.

As Paul wrote in Romans 5:20-21: *"Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* So with Paul we can say: "Though I am the chief of sinners, Jesus is my gracious Savior!"

Paul knew that abounding grace of God personally. There was nothing he did to bring himself to God's favor. There on the road to Damascus, even as his heart was set on enmity against Jesus, the Lord had mercifully confronted and converted him, and graciously brought him to repentance and saving faith.

Paul says: *"I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."* He is not saying his ignorance made him innocent. But Paul was including himself among those for whom Jesus prayed from the cross: *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"* (Luke 23:34). In mercy, Jesus forgave all his sins, as violent and blasphemous as they had been. In mercy, Jesus spared him the punishment his sins deserved. Not only that, Jesus poured out His abundant grace, His undeserved love, on Saul. He poured out the Holy Spirit and faith into his heart. Later Jesus sent Ananias to Saul saying: *"Arise and be baptized, and wash your sins*

*away, calling on the name of the Lord”*; and the Holy Spirit opened his eyes to a whole new life in Christ (Acts 9:17-18; 22:16).

Then Jesus even made the former opponent of the church into the apostle Paul, one of the chief proponents His saving Gospel! As Paul recounts: *“However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.”*

This is for our comfort. If the Lord showed such mercy, grace, and longsuffering to one who had so violently hated Him, opposed Him, and persecuted Him, He can give the same grace to us, no matter how horrible our sins have been. We all have our regrets in life. We feel guilt and shame for wrong things we have thought, said, or done; and we wish we could go back and undo the wrongs, and make them right. But what we could not do, the God of all grace has done for us. At the cross, God has taken away all our sin, guilt, and shame, and laid it on His Son. In Christ, God has undone all our wrongs and made all things right for us.

And as He did for Paul, God brought this justification to us personally. In baptism, He washed our sins away. He poured out His Holy Spirit on us with saving faith, opening our eyes to a whole new life as His children. Day by day, we live in His grace. As we confess our sins, He absolves and cleanses us from all sin and unrighteousness. As we come to the Lord’s Table, we receive His Body and Blood for our forgiveness and strength of faith. Day by day, we live in the blessed assurance that one day, He will take us to Himself in heaven, where will be no more sin or death, but only perfection and life.

In view of all this, Paul says: *“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.”* As an apostle, how he loved to emphasize this grace of God in saving of sinners! As that grace made Paul such a grateful servant and apostle, so that grace moves us to grateful service wherever the Lord puts us in our daily callings. We can share His abounding grace with others around us. We can say to the one carrying a burden of sin and guilt: *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; He came to save you!”*

As sinners saved by grace, we join Paul in praising our gracious God and Savior: *“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”*