

Good morning, church family.

Good morning.

Today's reading is 1 Timothy 1, verses 12 through 17.

I asked if I could read this morning's scripture reading because it's my favorite passage in the Bible.

It contains the verses that led me to be saved a little over a year ago.

Now, God didn't blind me like he did Saul, but my eyes were opened.

When I got to verses 13 and 14, he changed my life in an instant.

Those verses were written by the Apostle Paul almost 2,000 years ago, but they're still so very relevant today.

God led me here that night, even though I didn't know a single person here.

And now I'm so blessed to be part of this wonderful church family.

God is so amazing, isn't he?

And now starting at verse 12.

I thank Jesus Christ, our Lord,

who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent person, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

The grace of the Lord was poured out on me abundantly through the faith and the love that are in Christ Jesus.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.

But for that very reason, I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen.

Thank you, Chris.

What Chris just described is a miracle.

She said her eyes were open to see, to see her sin, and to see the mercy of God as it really is.

And let me pray for more miracles like that this morning as we open up this text.

Heavenly Father, without your intervention, without your help, we will not have eyes to see our own sin and need of a Savior, especially as dire and as drastic as that need is, Lord.

And therefore, we will not see how great and how awesome and how wonderful your mercy is.

So Lord, I ask for that to happen today.

I pray that you would open eyes, perhaps for the first time or maybe for the multiple time, but in new and fresh ways this morning so that we will worship you and praise you and give you all the glory that you do this morning.

We pray all this in Jesus' name, amen.

This paragraph here is Paul's second digression, and we're only like three paragraphs into 1 Timothy.

So he's writing to Timothy.

He's telling them how to deal with and basically how to excommunicate some false teachers that are within the Ephesian church.

So he begins, he tells him he's got to do it, starts telling him how to do it.

And then he digresses first, we saw last week, into an explanation of the law and the proper use of the law, why the law is here.

And we saw that the law was to help show us our sin, especially in the context of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, he says in verse 11.

But now he takes a second digression after mentioning that the law is to be found within the context of the gospel.

And he shows us, he doesn't just explain, but he shows us the gospel in the context of personal worship.

So it's almost as if Paul can't help himself.

He's got to talk about the gospel and he's got to worship God because of the gospel and in the context of the gospel.

This is what we were made for, right?

Joy rooted in praise and worship is what we were made for.

Worship that is given solely out of duty doesn't honor God.

Like we just had Valentine's Day recently.

Imagine if I went to my wife and I came home from work and I plopped some roses on the table and I was just like, here you go.

And she's like, well, why did you bring me flowers?

And I was like, it's my duty.

And I know that you would be mad if I did it.

That doesn't honor my wife, it honors me.

I did my duty despite what a nag she is.

That's what it's communicating.

That is not true of my wife and I did not do any of that, for the record.

So worship that's solely out of duty doesn't honor the object of our worship.

Worship that only happens with the help of music and a mood and vibes doesn't honor God either.

Music, vibes, mood, not bad things.

They can help us feel how we ought to feel about truth.

But if you only worship when the lighting is right, when we're hitting the right chord, when the mood is perfect,

then we gotta at least ask the question, what's going on here?

What's really driving my worship?

Worship that only talks about what God does for us is getting closer, but still isn't as honoring to God as it should be.

Joy rooted in praise and worship is most pure and intense when it's firmly grounded in and it begins with the object of the worship.

When it doesn't begin with something in me or doesn't begin with some kind of duty or obligation I feel, when it begins outside of me,

in the object of my worship and is grounded in the object of my worship, joy in praise and worship is the most pure and intense.

And the person most worthy of our worship, who produces the most joy when we worship him, is God seen clearly in the gospel.

And we see and experience that kind of joy and worship in this passage in real time as Paul talks about God's mercy.

Not just God's mercy in the abstract, but God's mercy personally towards him and as he draws us in to worshipping God.

So what we need to see here, this is the abstract principle, but we need to see it.

and know it a lot more personally, is that God's mercy is a gift for his glory and our joyful worship.

God's mercy is a gift for his glory and our joyful worship.

First thing we see in this passage is that God's mercy

Look at verses 12 and 13 and 15.

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 an insolent opponent.

but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief.

Skipping down to verse 15, this didn't just apply to Paul, but applied to everyone.

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.

What Paul's describing here is redemptive mercy.

Redemption is the buyback.

In regards to salvation, it's when Christ buys us back from the slave market of sin.

You see, you...

And I and Paul were slaves to sin apart from Christ.

And if you're apart from Christ, you're still a slave to sin.

All we could do was sin.

All of our good deeds and nice stuff that we did were tainted by selfish motives and other sinful desires.

And God in the Old Testament says that our righteous deeds, even the good stuff we do, is as filthy rags.

Not impressive to him.

He's not impressed with our helping the old lady across the street and our giving of little things here and there.

He sees to the heart.

And yet God, in his mercy, bought Paul back from this slavery at the price of his only son.

And in his great mercy, he bought Paul back from his slavery to sin.

Now, when Paul says that he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolent opponent, he's not exaggerating.

He describes himself in a couple places in Acts.

First, in Acts 9, 1-2, he says, This is how he's described by Luke.

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord...

went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues of Damascus so that if he found any belonging to the way or to Christianity, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Later in Acts, Paul describes himself.

He said, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and I did so in Jerusalem.

I not only locked up many of the saints in prison,

after receiving authority from the chief priests.

But when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme.

And in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

If Paul was doing today what he did then, he would be considered to be a self-righteous, genocidal terrorist.

And yet God redeemed him and used him to record most of what we have in the New Testament, as well as plant pretty much all of the Gentile churches in existence at the time of his death.

That's redemptive mercy.

That's an about face, a 180, like the church hadn't seen at the time.

So did Paul earn this mercy?

Well, it kind of sounds like it because he says, you know, I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.

But I think there's two things to remember when considering where this mercy comes from or why this mercy came to Paul.

One is that's only half of Paul's explanation.

If you look at verse 14,

And he's talking about why this mercy was shown to him, this redemptive mercy.

Verse 14 says, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

So he says, yeah, he says, I acted ignorantly and the grace of our Lord overflowed.

Like it was God's initiative.

But also when he says that, you know, this mercy came to him because he acted ignorantly.

You got to remember that that's legal language coming from the book of Numbers, right?

So Paul says,

versed in the law, taught, educated, highly educated in the law, is addressing an issue that some of the Jewish people might have seen with his ministry.

That, hey, you know, if Jesus was the Messiah and you were persecuting others for believing in him and you were defying God in that way, that would disqualify you from the people of God and disqualify you from further ministry.

And he's saying, no, that rebellion that I experienced was due to ignorance and unbelief.

It wasn't a sin of a high hand in Numbers 15, 29, 30, which was, I know the truth clearly, and yet I still willfully defy God.

Kent Hughes and Brian Chappelle explain it this way.

Paul was not saying that his acting ignorantly in unbelief had earned him mercy.

Rather, he meant that it did not disqualify him from receiving mercy.

His having sinned while ignorantly in unbelief indicates that he had not knowingly defied God with what the Old Testament calls sins of a high hand or purposeful defiance.

We do need to acknowledge something here though, that the Bible does talk and has a category for sins of a high hand, or similarly, but not quite the same thing, blaspheming against the Holy Spirit for which there is no forgiveness and mercy.

But these sins, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, sins committed with a high hand, are done with a certain hard and defiant heart that God turns over to its own desires.

Only God knows when those lines have been crossed.

We're told in the Old Testament that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.

Who can know it?

Meaning, I don't know my own heart thoroughly.

You don't know your own heart thoroughly.

Only God knows those, and he knows when those lines have been crossed.

But if you fear that you've crossed that line and desire to come back, I would encourage you to run back while you still have that desire.

Don't mess around.

God doesn't promise that you will always have that desire.

In fact, he describes, the author of Hebrews describes Esau who sought repentance but couldn't find it, meaning he sought to have the desire to repent, right, or the desire to come back to God, but could not find it in his heart to turn back to God.

He kept moving away, right?

He was turned over

to his sin and hardness of heart.

That's a real thing.

Where that line is, I don't know.

You don't know.

I don't know if you've crossed it or not.

But if you have a desire to turn back to God, do so while you can.

But that wasn't Paul, right?

So Paul's saying, that wasn't me.

And Paul didn't earn this redemptive mercy.

Rather, God's mercy was a gift

And the gift, in particular, looked like giving faith and love.

So he says that Christ's grace overflowed to him in faith and love.

Paul was full of unbelief and hate, but God overflowed faith and love into him.

Listen, so what we see here too, just side note, semi side note, little side note, is that faith comes from God, not from us.

We don't work up faith and belief in ourselves like an emotion.

We look at Jesus and we see his beauty and trustworthiness and that produces faith in us.

You know, we can choose to act lovingly, but you can't produce genuine warmth and affection in your heart.

God's redemptive mercy has to produce that in you.

So Paul says God overflows this faith and love into us.

You know what's amazing about Niagara Falls?

I mean, we're close enough.

I'm assuming you've all been there.

If you haven't, you should.

Shame on you.

Canadian side, go to the Canadian side.

USA is better in the Olympics, but Canada is better with the falls.

What's amazing about Niagara Falls is it doesn't stop.

I mean, it's an insane amount of water.

I've fished above Niagara Falls.

well enough above that we didn't go over, right?

And it's just that it's incredible how quick that river is moving and how much water is moving towards the falls.

And then when you see the falls, it's an immense amount of water.

It doesn't stop, except for like once or twice because of the ice built up and the army and stuff like that.

But that was really diverted.

It never really stopped, right?

It just keeps coming, right?

There's actually a painting of Niagara Falls and the painter didn't title it.

And so somebody kind of whimsically titled it More to Come, right?

It's just, it's never, never ending.

But God's redemptive mercy

is poured into us just like that.

God's overflow of faith and love towards his people, towards you and me, isn't in any more danger of stopping than Niagara Falls.

Martin Luther puts it this way, just as the sun is not darkened by the whole world enjoying its light and could indeed light up 10 worlds just as 100,000 lights might be lit from one light and not detract from it,

Just as a learned man is able to make a thousand others learned, and the more he gives, the more he has, so is Christ our Lord an infinite source of all grace, so that if the whole world would draw enough grace and truth from it to make the world all angels, yet it would not lose a drop.

The fountain always runs over full of grace.

God's mercy is a gift.

And it's a gift for his glory, first and foremost, for his glory.

Paul describes this redemptive mercy that he was shown as a display of patience.

You know, sure, there were people who had done worse things than Paul.

But a proper perspective of God's mercy produces the humble perspective that Paul has when he refers to himself as the foremost of sinners.

When we see God's mercy overflowing faith and love into us, we also see just how horrible our own sin is and how great the gift of that mercy is.

Look at verse 15 again.

This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost.

That's what saving faith looks like.

That's what it produces.

That confession, Christ came to save sinners, of whom I'm the foremost.

The greater purpose here, Paul is saying, in him receiving mercy, was to showcase God.

In particular, God's patience.

You know, when horrible things happen, it's natural to wonder why.

You know, why did God allow his people to be dragged off to jail?

Why did he bear with the murder of Stephen and of others at that time?

Why was God patient as Paul ravaged the church?

Rarely do we get specific answers to the why questions.

But Paul gives us a big picture answer, and that is that God intends to show his glory.

And this is true of every time we're prompted to ask that why question.

There's at least this big category answer that God intends to show his glory.

When God patiently allows bad things to happen to his people, there is a plan to display his glory, even if we can't see it yet.

And God's glory will always outshine the darkness that he calls his people to walk through.

In this case, it was to showcase God's patience.

God endured Paul's callous, pious, self-righteous, bigoted murderousness so that when he did redeem him, we would all marvel at just how far God's mercy and grace and patience extends.

God endured Paul's persecution of his church so that you sitting here today would see and know how far God's mercy goes.

God endured his persecution so that you sitting here today, who might be thinking that surely God's mercy and his grace can't extend to me, would know that yes, it can.

that you would see Paul's testimony and see what God did in and through Paul as a transformational example.

Paul's saying at the end of the verse here that others would believe and come to faith in Christ.

Paul hasn't seen that yet, but he trusts that it will because they see in Paul's testimony just how far God's mercy and grace can reach and how far they did reach in Paul's life.

And if God can transform a genocidal terrorist like Paul, he can redeem anyone who calls on his name.

Listen, if you know that you need mercy today,

if Christ's redemptive power, overflowing with faith and love to transform you from the inside out, if that sounds too good to be true, I'm telling you, and Paul's telling you here that it's not.

Repent and believe in him for life, life that will continue to grow forever and ever and produce

Joyful worship, right?

Worship that gives God the glory, but also that produces great joy, fullness of joy in us forevermore.

There's two types of worship we see in this passage that we see a proper perspective of God's mercy producing in this passage.

First is obvious at the end in verse 17.

It produces affectionate praise and honor.

Listen to Paul one more time.

To the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen.

I mean, you can feel as Paul reflects on all that God has done in his life.

And as he stands on the bow of the maid of the mist, right underneath the Niagara Falls of God's mercy, just staring up,

into all of God's mercy and overflowing to him in faith and love, that he's just overflowing with praise.

And knowing, right, that that grace and mercy is overflowing not just to him, but to every sinner that has turned to God in repentance and that will turn to God in repentance, Paul can't help but praise and give praise back to God.

God's glory on display in the gospel is what fuels true, pure worship, right?

God's glory is the fuel for worship.

God's mercy overflowing to us, if we're seeing it and we're understanding it clearly, ought to create a fountain of joy, love, and trust that spills over into praise.

like verbal praise, talking to God and talking to others about God.

You know, have you ever been reading the scriptures or reading someone else explaining the scriptures or reading the lyrics of a song even that have so moved you that you just have to praise God, right?

That you know, like you have God in mind

And you are praising and worshiping him for the truth that you just read and understood.

One of those songs for me is the song, I Will Glory in My Redeemer.

It doesn't matter if I'm singing it or reading it or whatever.

I almost can never get through it without tearing up.

And we'll try it today.

I'll read you a portion of it for just asking for it.

Verse one says, I will glory in my redeemer whose priceless blood has ransomed me.

Mine was the sin of

that drove the bitter nails and hung him on that judgment tree.

I will glory in my Redeemer, who crushed the power of sin and death, my only Savior before the Holy Judge, the Lamb who is my righteousness, the Lamb who is my righteousness.

Verse 3, I will glory in my Redeemer who carries me on eagle's wings.

He crowns my life with love and kindness.

this triumph song I'll ever sing.

I will glory in my Redeemer who waits for me at gates of gold.

And when he calls me, it will be paradise, his face forever to behold.

God's gift of mercy will produce affectionate praise as well as transform service.

It doesn't just stop with words, but we see at the beginning of this passage here in verse 12,

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.

Paul's redeemed life was a life of service.

He received redemption and mercy, and that immediately went into service, looking like service.

He counted it an honor to be considered faithful for the service of others and bringing them the good news.

Listen, we don't serve God because we owe him one.

We don't serve God so that he'll owe us one.

Where we serve God as an act of worship, as an overflow of praise and of a desire to honor him.

I mean, what did God, our God, do the first time he came to this earth?

He came and he served.

Mark 10 says,

You know, we see the beauty of Christ's service and we want to be beautiful like that.

And we want to honor his glory on display in his service.

Also, just think about this.

The Father, the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who experienced the joy and the happiness of each other's presence for eternity past, all of eternity.

They're experiencing it even now.

Even they, in all that joy and satisfaction that they experienced together, still find joy in serving their people at great cost to themselves.

Hebrews 12.2 says, There's great joy in serving others as an overflow of love because of God's mercy.

We experience love and faith from God as an act of mercy and

and that overflows from us to others.

And listen, it's not all cotton candy and cheap thrills, serving other people's work, and it's hard and it hurts sometimes, but there's a deep satisfaction and joy in a life of worship and a selfless life dedicated to knowing God and making him known among other people.

God's mercy is a gift for his glory, first and foremost for his glory and our joyful worship.

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.

Let's pray.

Lord, would you open our eyes to see you in your beauty, in your majesty, in your glory, in the face of Jesus this morning.

Lord, would you help us to know, really know the mercy and the grace that we've been shown.

Lord, you do crown our life with love and kindness, those of us that have put your faith and hope in you.

We don't deserve an ounce of it.

Lord, we just ask that you protect us from self-righteousness even now.

Lord, I ask that you protect us from thinking that we've earned it, that we deserve it.

And Lord, would you help us to throw ourselves at your feet again?

that we would throw ourselves at your feet again, knowing that you already have lifted us up and called us your children, and that you have overflowed faith and love into us and through us.

Lord, I pray that our lives would match our words today.

Lord, that we would live lives of worship and not just say worshipful things.

Lord, and that you would give us joy in knowing you and making you known to other people.

I pray all this in Jesus' name.

Amen.