

**Romans 1:1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God**

Throughout history, the Lord has made a habit of drawing the most unlikely characters to Himself. People who others would think incapable of ever coming to know Him.

- A young man who was known for being a brawler, a drunk, and a rebel, met Christ and became a father to over 2,000 orphans and a founder of a great missionary movement, his name was George Muller.
- A young teenager who didn't much care about faith, kidnapped and turned into a slave in a foreign country, the Lord grabs his heart, frees him, and transforms him into a missionary to the country who enslaved him, Maewyn Succat, better known as St. Patrick.
- A man who was described as a monster, who murdered people and then ate their remains, comes to Christ in prison, his name was Jeffrey Dahmer.
- A politician's hatchet man who helped cover up illegal dealings and try to affect elections was discovered and imprisoned, met Christ, and became an evangelist and christian leader, his name was Charles Colson.
- A religious radical, who persecuted those of another religion, killing, imprisoning, and forcing them to deny their faith, from children to elderly, meets Christ on a road to a neighboring city and becomes one of the most influential people in history, his name was Saul of Tarsus, later known as Paul the apostle.

**1 Timothy 1:12-17 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but 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. 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. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all long-suffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.**

- Paul was writing to Timothy, whom he called his son in the faith, as Timothy held down the fort and put in order the Church at Ephesus, known as one of the pastoral epistles, 1 Timothy shows us how we are to run a New Covenant church. In the first chapter, Paul begins telling Timothy to ensure that no other doctrine is taught other than the true Gospel of grace.

**1 Timothy 1:13-14 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but 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.**

- The first time we learn of Saul, he is holding the coats of those who murdered the first martyr of the Church, Stephen in Acts 6.
- After this, Saul began a crusade to eliminate Christians, and act that forced them to spread out of Jerusalem and expand beyond the borders of Israel. This is what Paul is thinking back to when he writes verse 13. But then in verse 14, he states how God's exceedingly abundant grace was bestowed on him. The first time we read of this account it is in Acts 9.

**Acts 9:1-2 - Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.**

- This is what Paul was referring to in 1 Timothy 1:13. Such was Saul's hatred of Christians and zeal for the Jewish law that he was determined to pursue them no matter where they ran. He had persecuted them to where many had fled beyond the geographical boundaries of Israel, reaching Damascus and beyond to cities such as Antioch.
- But he wasn't satisfied with driving them out of Jerusalem, he wanted to destroy them. So he requested the permission to hunt them down and drag them back for trial. But God had other plans, which is what Paul tells us in verse 14 of 1 Timothy. Keep reading in Acts 9 and you'll see how God revealed His exceedingly abundant grace to Paul.

**3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." 6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. 8 Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.**

- It says he was trembling and astonished, as it was likely a terrifying experience, but Saul made two great questions we should take note of.
  - 1) "Who are you, Lord?" - Saul realized he wasn't talking to a mere man. But we truly need to know who Jesus is. Some of us think we know Him, but we only know of Him. For the rest of Saul's life, he dedicated himself to going deeper into the answer to this question. He would declare that the mission of his life was to know Jesus, and make Him known
  - 2) "Lord, what do you want me to do?" - Once we know Jesus, we need to let Him be the Lord of our lives. He comes to live in us, the Spirit becomes our teacher and the one who gives us strength. Because He is in us, He becomes our ever present guide, and we can trust that He is guiding us and leading us, and we should gladly let Him lead!
  - **Acts 9:15-16 (NKJV): But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."**

**Acts 22:6-16 "Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. 7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' 8 So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' 9 "And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. 10 So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.' 11 And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus. 12 "Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, 13 came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him. 14 Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. 15 For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'**

- Paul adds details, such as the time of day. Think about it, the noon sun is usually bright, yet Jesus shone even brighter than Paul fell to the ground, so it was a terrifying event. He also adds that those with him had seen the light but not heard the voice.
- He also tells us how Ananias called him brother. Despite the initial fear of going to Paul, Ananias accepted a man who had come to murder him as a brother. This is the exceedingly abundant grace that Paul talks about. How Jesus turns enemies to brothers, how He transforms murderers to minister.

**Acts 26:12-18** “While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, 13 at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. 14 And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ 15 So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. 17 I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’

- Here Paul adds that Jesus spoke to him in Hebrew, and in that language that was so important to Paul, Jesus commissioned him to be an apostle, and gave him the Gospel of Grace that Paul would preach ever more.
- Paul met Jesus in an amazing way. A man who had done so much evil, became one of the greatest, if not the greatest, Christian missionaries in history. He wrote almost half the New Testament, and had an understanding of God's grace beyond what even the original apostles understood at the time. As he spoke to Agrippa, he fulfilled what Jesus had said he would do, **“he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”(Acts 9:15)**

**1 Timothy 1:15-16** 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. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all long-suffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

- **“After Paul was saved, he became a foremost saint. The Lord did not allot him a second-class place in the church. He had been the leading sinner, but his Lord did not, therefore, say, ‘I save you, but I shall always remember your wickedness to your disadvantage.’ Not so: he counted him faithful, putting him into the ministry and into the apostleship, so that he was not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles. Brother, there is no reason why, if you have gone very far in sin, you should not go equally far in usefulness.” (Spurgeon)**

**1 Timothy 1:17** Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

- As Paul thinks back on his life, who he was before he met Jesus, he doesn’t feel shame, he doesn’t feel condemnation or remorse. Instead, he worships. He only sees the exceedingly abundant grace of God. He isn’t dragged down by memory of his sin, but instead rejoices in the realization of how much grace Jesus poured out on him.
- Is that your reaction? When you think about your life, do you realize the exceedingly abundant grace of God on your life and go into worship?