

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. ¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Dear Friends,

What do you want to be when you grow up? That is not such an easy question to answer because there are so many choices of what you can do and sometimes, we have to try a few things before we find the right one. I've had some of those experiences myself. In high school I thought about becoming an auto mechanic and then a surveyor but took a job in a lumber yard. It was okay but not what I wanted to do for the rest of my life so I enlisted in the Marines. After 7 years in the Marines, I got a job in the electronics industry and that was pretty exciting. It gave my family and I the opportunity to move around and live in different parts of the country. Dawn and I were always active in church wherever we lived and in 1993 our synod held a seminar to recruit 2nd career men to be pastors. Dawn and I attended and found out here was an opportunity to study for the fulltime ministry, which I started in 1996 and graduated from the seminary in 2003 and have been a pastor ever since. It's not that those other jobs were the wrong jobs for me, they just helped prepare me for God's call to me to be a pastor.

As we study this portion of scripture, the Apostle Paul is encouraging a young pastor by the name of Timothy. Timothy was the pastor of a church that was surrounded by false religions and Paul wanted to make sure that Timothy didn't forget the power of the Gospel. He wanted to make sure that Timothy would not let himself or his church, be influenced by those false religions surrounding him. Paul began his words of encouragement by describing his own conversion and entry into the ministry.

I. Paul was what you might call a "2nd career Apostle." Paul had chosen his 1st career and he was pretty good at it. His business card read, "Persecutor of Christians." As part of his 1st career, he was a blasphemer, speaking slander against Jesus. He took great pride in persecuting as many Christians as he could catch, and he had no trouble giving his approval to violence even to the point of watching Christians being stoned to death. Paul was on the fast track to fame and fortune as a Zealous Judaizer, but because of his ignorance and unbelief, he was also on the fast track to eternal damnation. But God had plans for Paul. You might even say that Paul's job persecuting Christians helped prepare him for his new calling because it helped Paul to experience God's Amazing Grace.

One day, on the road to Damascus, God called Paul to faith, and in doing so he wiped away Paul's cloud of ignorance and unbelief with the Gospel, and filled Paul with the Holy Spirit. God then used Ananias and the disciples in Damascus to instruct Paul with the Word and as they instructed Paul in the Word not only did Paul's faith grow but Paul's knowledge in God's Word grew too. And as Paul's knowledge in God's Word grew so did his excitement grow to go out and share this wonderful message with others.

Paul uses this example of his conversion to encourage Timothy. There is no doubt that Paul was a lost and condemned sinner and yet God brought faith into his heart and called Paul to a special ministry among the Gentiles. This example of Paul is a clear picture of how the power to save comes completely from God. It is a clear picture of how we can't do anything to save ourselves and how some people don't even know they need saving. Paul is encouraging Timothy by showing him the power of the Gospel that was evident in his own life.

Not only was this encouragement for Timothy, but it is also encouragement for us. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us, **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”** We have been saved by the same grace of God that also saved Paul. We weren't struck blind as we were walking down the road, but through the Gospel, we were shown the narrow path of salvation. And by God's grace, through the power of the Gospel, we have that undeserved gift of eternal life. And not only has God called us to faith, but he also has plans for our lives and sometimes nudges us in certain directions with the choices that he gives us.

II. Not everyone is called to be a pastor but **Peter** reminds us, **“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”** (1 Peter 2:9) We have all been called out of the darkness of sin into the wonderful light of salvation. We have all been called out of the darkness of sin to share that wonderful light of salvation with those around us. These words are for all of God's people. You don't have to declare this wonderful news from a pulpit but we can declare it with how we live our lives and in the way we treat people and talk to them.

We are living in chaotic times but we can still show love to people and God still gives us the opportunity to share the Gospel – it the Good News about what Jesus has done for us that will change the hearts of those around us. That seems simplistic but it is true – look what the gospel did for Paul – he was a pretty violent guy until the Holy Spirit changed his heart so never underestimate the power of God's Word.

Paul calls it a trustworthy message. It is trustworthy because it comes from God and because it comes from God it deserves full acceptance. It deserves full acceptance because God does not lie to us. God's Word is never wrong. We can see that as we compare the Old Testament prophecies to the New Testament fulfillment of them. The Old Testament prophecies all pointed to the coming of the Savior and Jesus fulfilled those prophecies when He came into this world to save us from our sins. Everything we need is contained in God's Word. We don't need anything else. we don't need the Koran, or the Book of Mormon, or the Watchtower news. All we need is God's Word. It is complete. It contains this trustworthy message.....

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners -- of whom I am the worst.” One sentence that summarizes God’s love and mercy so completely. Just think about those words for a minute. Christ, the eternal Son of God promised as the Messiah. Jesus, true man, so named because he would save his people from their sins. Came into the world, Christ willingly left heaven to humble himself, placing himself under the law to redeem those under the law. To save sinners -- of whom I am the worst, the world is full of sinners. Last week we heard, **“for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”** And anyone who breaks the law in one place is guilty of breaking it all. We, along with Paul, must confess that we are the worst of sinners. Every sin committed by us or anyone else is enough to condemn us to eternal damnation. All sins are equally condemning whether they be gossiping about our neighbor or murdering someone. The fact is Sin condemns us.

Paul tells us we are the chief of sinners and yet as we grieve over our sins, we take comfort in the fact that Jesus paid for those sins on the cross. Jesus paid for the sins of the world, all the sins of the world, and through faith we receive the assurance that he paid for each and every one of our sins . The example of the Apostle Paul, shows us that no sin is beyond God's grace. The only sin God cannot forgive is the sin against the Holy Spirit where a person deliberately defies God and consistently pushes God out of his life. But for the person who comes to His Lord confessing his sins, God has the wonderful assurance that your sins are forgiven. What a wonderful message, Your sins are forgiven!

III. With such a wonderful message of grace and salvation, it is no wonder that Paul breaks out with a message of joy and praise to end this portion of scripture. Paul praises God for being the only God from all eternity and points out that the ultimate purpose of all believers is to praise God both now in this life and forever in eternity.

With the love of God in our hearts we can't help but praise him for this wonderful gift of salvation. With the love of God in our hearts we can't help but share this wonderful message with others. As we cling to the cross of Christ our faith honors and glorifies the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God.

We may be unsure of what career to pick in this life on earth, but the one thing we can be sure of is that we are messengers of Christ. We have the sure message of salvation; Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners! Share this message with others because this is a message that doesn't change. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!

Share this message with others because this is a trustworthy message that we can always rely on. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!

No matter what we are doing in this world may it always reflect this message of grace – Christ Jesus came into the world to save the lost and that includes me! Amen.