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I Timothy 1:12-20 "In Gratitude of Grace"  
February 21, 2021

All right. Let open our bibles this morning to I Timothy Chapter 1 verse 12.

How many of you think that your salvation is a miracle? Some of you think not? Come talk to me later. I think if you believe that to be so, you're going to like what Paul had to say this morning.

Paul was going home from his second missionary journey when he stopped by Ephesus, saw some tremendous potential, but really felt compelled to go home. A few months later he went back to Ephesus. Spends almost three years planting a church in a very big, heathen city. And by the time that Timothy is sent there by Paul to be the pastor of the church, nine years have passed. And the church is having tremendous problems already, even after nine years, with false teachers. The problem is, Paul and Timothy are not anything alike. Paul was always ready for a good fight. He's loud and obnoxious in many ways. Timothy was kind of ready to make peace. He's not a very aggressive guy; very timid, if you will, in everything that we read about him, and yet God sent him to follow up on the work that Paul had begun.

We talked a lot about, you don't have to feel like you're qualified to go and do God's work. As long as God calls you, He'll enable you.

Well, back in verse 3 Paul had urged Timothy to stay there and to fix the problem, but Timothy, like I said, was very timid, Paul writes in the first 11 verses, Come on. If you go back and teach the word, God will use it. They're using the law as if it's a performance meter, like work your way to heaven. We know that's not at all what can happen. The law's only good to convict us of sin so we can turn our hearts to Christ.

Well, before we get to verse 18 where Paul will charge Timothy again to do that work and encourage this very

timid disciple of his, Paul sticks in the middle what we are going to look at this morning as we'll finish the first chapter, but Paul will really point to himself to say, Look, Timothy, if God can do it in my life, and if God can do it in your life, these false teachers are in trouble, because God can do it in theirs as well. He wants to encourage him to have a great confidence in the power of God's word and in the proof that he has already done that so often in the lives of those who are, I won't say unqualified, because we all are, but that it's not so likely that these are the kind of people that get saved, guys like Paul himself. But his life was changed forever. In order to encourage Timothy Paul says, He did it for me, He's done it for you, He'll do it through you for the lives of others. Stand fast, man. Go do this job and have confidence in what God can do.

Verse 12, "And I thank Jesus Christ our Lord who has enabled me," Paul writes, "because He's counted me faithful, He's put me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord Jesus was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."

For sure the gospel can change lives. I mean, in the Bible you can go and look at examples of dramatic conversions, in history as well, of how God's word getting into the heart of a man changed him, and the heart of a woman.

Luther was a Catholic monk before he met the Lord. John Newton was a slave trader before he came to Jesus. Charles, or Chuck, Colson was a White House aide during the Nixon administration. Got caught up in the whole Watergate thing, came to know the Lord. Charles "Tex" Watson was one of the Manson murderers who gave his life to the Lord many years ago, and is still walking with the Lord faithfully today.

You come to Jesus, things change. C.S. Lewis was an amazing skeptic who had the linguistic power to argue, and yet when he met Jesus, his life changed. God touched the traitor like Matthew, the adulteress woman in Samaria, the wicked tax collector Zacchaeus, the Ethiopian eunuch, the Philippian jailor. And you. He changed you, which speaks volumes, I think, of God's power. He would save you.

Certainly one of the most remarkable conversions ever recorded is that of the apostle Paul. He became the foremost evangelist in the church, a pastor and theologian like the world had never seen. He constantly gives his testimony because it is so powerful that what God has done in your life.

Sometimes Christians, young Christians, say, I don't know what to say. I don't know the Bible very well. And I always say this: "Well, tell people what God did for you." People around you will already know, others can hear about it.

Paul writes about his testimony, sometimes in great depth, sometimes in passing. But he mentions it in Acts Chapter 9 and Chapter 22 and Chapter 26. He writes about it in the first two chapters of the book of Galatians, writes about it in Philippians Chapter 3. Writes about it here as well. I don't know what's more powerful than look what the Lord did in my life. And Paul sets that before Timothy to say, if He did it for me, just think what He can do through you.

When you read in Revelation Chapter 12 about the tribulation saints that have begun to be killed for their faith and they begin to show up in heaven, that the question is asked, "Who are these?" And the angel replies, "These are those who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." They have lived their lives by the testimony of their life.

The first sermon you'll ever preach is your life that's been changed. Paul never lost sight of the wonder that he felt that God would save him. I don't know if you felt that way when you got saved. Unfortunately, sometimes I think we lose track of that, but Paul never seemed to be able to divorce himself from the fact that he'd been redeemed by God's love. In fact, he viewed himself as the prime example in his life, and around him, of what God could do. He'll say as much in verse 16, "God saved me so that he can show others what He can do in your life if you'll let Him." And that's Paul's encouragement to Timothy.

It isn't a wonder, I guess, that Paul would always be grateful when you look at the kind of life he led before he was saved. His personal biographer, Luke, writes of

Paul that he was a murderous, religious predator, that he breathed slaughter against the church and murder against the disciples. He was a violent man. When Paul years later stood before King Agrippa and told of his exploits and of his work, he said, "I did everything that I could contrary to the Jesus of Nazareth. I went to Jerusalem. I put saints in prison. I received authority from the chief priests. And when they were put to death, I voted that they were put to death. I even got authority to punish them in every synagogue, compel them to blaspheme, and then to arrest them. I enraged myself against them and persecuted them to the foreign cities roundabout." Not a nice guy. A horrible man. Callous and self-righteous, bigoted murderer. And he was bent on, full scale, to eliminate Christianity, period. To annihilate it. His hatred didn't just stop in Jerusalem. He got extradition papers from the highest priest to travel 150 miles north to Damascus for the purpose of just rooting out a Christian community there. He was hunter. He was a man of blood, and he thrived in it.

It wasn't until being outside of the city of Damascus there, according to Acts 9, that at high noon the Lord stopped Paul, appeared to him, and his life was changed forever. And this unmanageable tiger ran into the Lion of the tribe of Judah on an off-ramp near Damascus. And Paul never forgot it. He never forgot that God would take the likes of him in. He constantly, when he shares his testimony, mentions the mercy and the grace of God. I don't deserve this. I can't believe that God would give this to me.

When he wrote to the Corinthians in Chapter 15, he wrote, "I am the least of the apostles. I'm not even worthy to be called the apostle. I persecuted God's church. I went after God's people." He wrote to the Ephesians, "I am least than the least of the saints, but God gave me His grace. But I don't belong here." And that wasn't something that Paul wrote immediately after he was saved. That's what he wrote five years later, and ten years later, and 15 years later. He never lost sight of that goodness. He writes in here, God enabled me. God enabled me. The word "enabled" means to strengthen or to empower. He enabled me after my salvation to begin to serve Him. He wrote to the Philippians, "I can now do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

But Paul was not at all unwilling to say to everyone who

would listen, this is what I was like, but look what I am. Look at what I've become now that the Lord has taken my life. He wrote it in almost all of his epistles. He wrote to Timothy in the last thing that he would ever write, "The Lord stood with me. The Lord strengthened me, that I might fully preach the gospel of the Gentiles like He's called me." To the very end he saw God's strengthening and enabling, and it moved him. It touched his life, changed him.

When Paul asked the Lord to remove that thorn in the flesh that he was suffering with, and he prayed again and again, and the Lord finally just says to Paul, "Paul, my strength is made perfect in your weakness," it was Paul who immediately said, "Then I am going to enjoy being weak, because if I'm weak, then You're strong." And that had been proved in Paul's life over and over.

But look, Paul wanted Timothy now to approach this work in Ephesus the same way. These were tough people that were in Ephesus. These are bad people. In fact, all you have to do is read ahead 20 years. These people would eventually kill Timothy in Ephesus for his work. Eventually he would die at their hands. But that hardly concerned Paul. Look what God has done in my life, and look what God can do in yours.

Paul understood God's goodness. He counted me faithful, he said, and put me in the ministry. God took me and made something of my life. And far from bragging. Paul bragged a lot about God's enabling, not his abilities whatsoever.

But notice in verse 13 that Paul was very aware of where he'd come from. It's good to remember where you've come from. Notice he writes the word, "I was a blasphemer and a persecutor. I was an insolent man." But that's all modified by the adverb "formerly." That's what I used to be. It's no longer who I am. I've attained mercy. And Paul goes on to say that he obtained mercy because what he did, he did ignorantly in unbelief.

It's interesting to me that from God's perspective, unbelievers think that they're doing the right thing, until you get God's perspective and you realize how sinful you are. You'll find that written time and again. When Peter stands up in Acts 3 and gives his message to the people gathered, he talked to them about killing

Jesus, the savior. He said, "But I know that you and your rulers did it in ignorance, but now it's time to repent." It's kind of like once you see it, then you got to act upon it. And Paul for years in trying to kill the believers, the church, believed he was doing the absolute will of God, but when he found out otherwise, he repented, he turned to the Lord, and he never looked back. I guess that would be your story as well. That's why Jesus on the cross was able to say, "Father, forgive them," comma, "they don't know what they're doing." Their understanding is not there. As Peter did as well.

Paul was responsible for his sin, but when he faced the truth, the Lord gave him mercy. And Paul thanked the Lord. But his point to Timothy is, look where I've come from and what God is able to still do with me. Just imagine what He can do in those folks that are listening to you, if you'll just give them the same word that we heard that changed us. Look around, Timothy.

He says in verse 14 God's grace was exceedingly abundant, or if you will, it was more than enough. It was overflowing in my life. This tough guy now became a man of grace and love.

It's important, I think, to remember where you've come from, because that's not you anymore. I got saved a month out of high school. I will just say that my high school years were not the best. I got good grades. I got a full scholarship to college. I did very well in the scholastic area of my life, but morally I was an idiot. When I went to my ten-year high school reunion, I was a pastor. I brought a Bible. My friends couldn't believe what happened to me. They would say, "Have you talked to Jack? He's a pastor now." And they would ask, "What's wrong with you?" "Oh, no. It's what's right with me." What has God done. Within an hour I had to go home, because no one wanted to talk to me anymore.

But isn't it great to see where God has brought us from? And Paul never forgot how thankful he was. He came so far. And Timothy, I know you're scared and these guys are tough-looking guys. It's going to be tough, but look what God can do. Thank God for His grace. He might feel overwhelmed, but God can enable you, said Paul. He's done it with me, he can do it with you.

He writes in verse 15, "This is a faithful saying and

it's worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I'm chief." There are five places in these three little pastoral books that Paul writes where he uses the phrase "this is a faithful saying." Four of them are in I and II Timothy, one is in Titus. But it is a phrase that he uses to usually introduce kind of key doctrines, summarizes key doctrines. Here and in Chapter 4 verse 9 he adds the words, "This is a saying that is worthy of all acceptance," or deserving of attention. And at least in this verse, in Greek, he adds only eight words to follow to describe the entire gospel: Jesus Christ came into the world in the flesh to save sinners. It's exactly what the angel said to Joseph. "Mary, your wife, is with child. It is a work of the Lord. The child that she bears will be the savior. Name him Jesus. He's coming to save his people from their sin." When Jesus spoke to His detractors there in Luke 19 verse 10, He said to them, "Look, the Son of Man has come to seek and to save those that are lost." That's God's interest.

If you realize that you're a sinner, you have nothing to fear from Jesus, because He's coming for you. He came for you. It is only when you decide to tell Him you're not one that you and He are going to have a problem, because He died for your sins. He didn't and shouldn't die needlessly.

Remember what he said to the woman caught in adultery. You remember when they dragged this poor woman, these guys did, to Jesus, and it says in John Chapter 8, "We caught this woman in the very act of adultery." Somehow, they let the guy go through. They only brought the girl, and I think it infuriated Jesus. But in any event, these self-righteous clowns, they put this poor woman in tears. And Jesus, it says, bent down and began to write in the dirt. Now, we're not told what He wrote, but we are told the result. And I suspect that He began to write down some of secret sins of these men that he knew that no one else knew, because one by one they began to leave. And finally, Jesus looked at the woman and He said, "Woman, where are your accusers? Are there none here to condemn you?" And she looked around. She said, "No, Lord." And He said to her, "Neither do I condemn you. Now you go sin no more."

Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn us. Your sin will do that. We don't need Jesus to come do that. That

is what He said to Nicodemus, "The son of man didn't come into the world to condemn, but that the world through Him might be saved." That's why Jesus came. That's a good saying in eight words.

And Paul realized that he was the one for whom the Lord had come. In all of the world Paul felt that there was no one as sinful as he. And maybe you feel like that about yourself. But to the degree that you're aware of that, you're going to be very bold. If God can save you, He can save anyone. Now, that might sound patronizing if you're anyone but Paul, but Paul very honestly, sincerely, and often shared this very sentiment. He saw himself every day as the chief of sinners. In fact, if you read at the end of this verse, it says, "of whom I am chief." That's written in the present tense. He didn't say I was chief, but I've really reformed. Now I'm doing great work. No, he still saw himself that way.

And then he says this, and I think here's the lesson: "However, for this reason I've obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show himself all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for eternal life." Paul really believed that the greatest witness that he has was his changed life. It might very well be the greatest witness you have.

My father was so against my salvation. We argued endlessly. He struggled as an immigrant from Holland to pay our bills when we were young. He sent us to Catholic school, which was expensive. When I got saved, he said, "You've caused me to waste all of that money." He couldn't be more angry. When my wife passed away at 25, he expected me to go off the deep end, and I didn't. He said to me one day, "You seem to be all right." I said, "Well, God does what God wants to do." Six or seven years into our argumentative relationship he said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to church." He said, "It's not Sunday." I said, "I know, but every day's God's day." Five years later, 12 years in all, he went to church with me and got saved. And it wasn't on a Sunday. It was actually on a Saturday night up in the mountains.

Your testimony is the greatest thing that God has given you to start with. You have His word. Certainly, you share that, but your life has been changed. Look what Paul says, the way he viewed himself, "God takes my life

and sets me apart as a testimony to you, that God has longsuffering patience, and that He will change the lives of those who believe in Him and give them eternal life."

I believe it is that power that you possess, all of us. You have a testimony to give. For many months on Wednesday nights when we were over in the main sanctuary, we had people come up and give their testimonies, and we stopped when this whole COVID thing started. Things were in upheaval and it was difficult. We are going to go back to those. If you have a testimony you want to share, if you'll call the office, we'll get you hooked up, and you can come on a Wednesday night and share with us what God has done in your life. I don't think there's anything more powerful that we can hear than that.

It was in 1918 during the first World War that in Tokyo, **Takichi Ichi** is his name, was a fellow that had been thrown in jail for murder. He had been jailed 20-something different times. He was a tough guy. On death row, though, two missionaries in Japan sent him a New Testament with a note, and the note had this verse on it, I Timothy 1:16. God can change your life. He read the note, and gave his life to Christ. Five days later he was killed. He was hung for his crimes. He wrote a note and gave it to the jail keeper, and at the bottom was written II Corinthians Chapter 6 verses 8, 9, and 10, which basically says, "In honor and in dishonor, by evil report or by good report, as deceiver and yet true, unknown and yet known, dying and yet we live, chastened but we're not killed, sorrowful, yet we're ever rejoicing, making many rich, we become nothing, and yet we possess everything." And then he wrote at the bottom under those verses, last things he would ever write, he said, "Today Jesus has purified my soul and I'm going back to the city of God." God's word. God's power.

The reality that drove Paul should drive you to speak up. Will people always hear you? No. Will they like what they hear? Probably not. Will it make you a lot of friends? It doesn't always. But I tell you what it will do: It will change lives and people get saved, because God's word is powerful. And if your life is being lived for the Lord, your example will be powerful as well.

What are you afraid of? You're a miracle. Someone saved you. The Lord came to you. Someone prayed for you.

Someone shared with you. And none of you deserve to be in, and yet you're all going to Heaven. And now the Lord leaves you here to tell others, and as hesitant as you might be, Timothy found great hesitancy in the work that he was being called to do.

Paul saw himself at the bottom of the barrel, and God reaching down to save him. To say to Timothy, hey, if you can do it for me.

I forget the preacher that first said that I heard, "God will save to the gutter-most." Not to the uttermost, just to the gutter-most. And that's where Paul felt he was. I'm the least. I'm the chief sinner, but God is going to use my life as an example of what His patience looked like and what His power looks like.

And then he says in verse 17, "to the king eternal, immortal, and invisible, to God alone who is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." Which absolutely doesn't fit here, but I think Paul was so excited about thinking about what God has done, he just threw up a little praise, broke into a little song. He tends to throw these in where they don't belong, but they do belong. But before he gets to Timothy to sum up his challenge to him, he says, "Oh, isn't God amazing." Without beginning, without end. Eternal, immortal. Seen only by those who look for Him, who alone is wise.

I remember reading Isaiah 45 verse 18, great verse, and it says, "The Lord says, Who made the heavens and the earth? Who is like Him? There is no one like God. I'm the only one. There's no one like Me." That's the God that you're serving. That's the God that we're serving.

Well, he ends in verse 18 by saying then to Timothy, "This charge I give to you, son Timothy." The word "charge" is the same word as "urge" in verse 3. I charge you, or I encourage you, that you, Timothy, "according to the prophecies made previously concerning you, that you would wage this good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith and they have suffered shipwreck of their faith, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I've delivered to Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme."

Again Paul, like in verse 3, orders Timothy. This is a military word, not a suggestion. Come, on dude. It's

right in the Bible, see that? Come on, dude. The original Greek is "Come on, dude." Paul wanted Timothy to take on the responsibility that God had given to him. And notice what he after having argued from the point of God can do this in any man's life, look at what He's done for me, he says to Timothy, God told you your calling. We've prayed for you. We've laid our hands upon you. We've asked the Lord to show you what you can do, what you should do. So go do it. Go do it.

Paul had a real sense of duty when it came to his Christianity. I hope that you feel that responsibility as well. It's not my job to do your work. It's your work. You go do it. It's your calling. You go do it. I'll do mine, you do yours. That's the way we're supposed to work.

When Paul was speaking to Agrippa there in Acts 26, he said to Agrippa, "When the Lord saved me," he said, "the Lord told me I was going to go to the Gentiles to speak." And he said, "King, I didn't and wasn't disobedient to that calling." In other words, when I realized what God wanted from me, I went and did it, and I went and served the Lord and did what He told me to do, what He called me to do.

When Paul wrote to the I Corinthians Chapter 9 verse 16, he said, "If I preach the gospel, there's nothing I can boast of. Necessity has been laid upon me to preach the gospel. If I do it willingly," he says, "I'll get a reward. But if I do it unwillingly, it's still my charge, still my job, still my responsibility. I can either participate or not, but I've got to do it, because that's what God's called me to do." Well, you and I have been called to that as well.

Now, he mentions to Timothy here that Timothy had been given prophecies regarding his ministry and his life. And oftentimes, as when men were sent out of the church, or even when missionaries go from here, we oftentimes just lay hands on these guys, pray for them, "God, be with them." And oftentimes in prayer God will speak to the person being prayed for. You might remember when Paul was home in Antioch and he was pastoring the church. Everything was fine. At a prayer meeting the Lord spoke to that group of people praying and said, "Set aside for me Barnabas and Paul for the work that I have for them." And in so doing, Paul began his many years of travel and

church planting that had begun there in Antioch.

When Paul wrote to Timothy later on in Chapter 4 of this book, he will write, "Timothy, until I get there, I want you to give time in the church for reading, and for exhortation, and for doctrine. And don't neglect the gift that God gave you, which is in you by the prophecies given to you by the laying on of hands of the elders." When Paul writes his last letter to Timothy, Chapter 1 of II Timothy, he said, "Look, Timothy, I want you to stir up the gift that God has given you when I laid my hands on you and prayed for you." And then he said, "God hasn't given you the spirit of fear. He's given you the Spirit of power and love and of a sound mind. Don't be ashamed of the gospel, and don't be ashamed of me His prisoner. Speak up, man." Timothy was struggling a lot, but God had told Timothy He would be with him. And Paul's argument here in Chapter 1 is just look what He's done with us. That work can still be done, Timothy, in your life and through your life. Be bold, share, and teach, and minister. Fight the good fight of faith. But it would be a battle, but Timothy needed to know that God was with him and would bless him.

Notice as Paul finishes that Paul mentions two guys in particular that when Paul was there, he had put out of the church. You read he had delivered them to Satan. It's really back to the world, where he's the God of this world, that they could learn not to blaspheme God. I don't think he threw them out to keep them out, he threw them out so they could go, "I want to be back in. I hate it out here where the devil rules." Church discipline.

But in any event, these two names are interesting. Hymenaeus, we know was with a guy named Philetus, because he shows up in the second letter that Paul would write as a guy that was with these two men in the church just spewing junk and stumbling God's people. The fellow Alexander, we can only guess. If you go back to Acts 19, he was a coppersmith who was the head of the unions in town and who caused great trouble for the church; even led a riot that chased Paul pretty much out of Dodge. If he's still that guy, then nine years later this guy's nothing but a problem still.

But Paul had asked them to leave. Timothy would have to keep them out. Timothy would have to engage some of these things, and change the church leadership, and go

back to teaching the scriptures. And Paul will do that and talk about how the church should be run. In fact, much of this book is just, here's how the church should behave. Forget these guys. Let's go do the church stuff that we're supposed to be doing. But for now, go fight the good fight, buddy.

Look, if we are grateful for God's grace in our own life, then you have to believe that if God can do it for you, He can do it for the people that you love. Your father, who like my father for 12 years decided to fight. My mom got saved a year before she died, which was good for her, and good for us.

If He can do it for you, He can do it through you. Go tell someone what God has done for you. It doesn't matter how they respond. His Word never goes out void. And I can assure you of one thing: You'll be a fruitful person, and God will accomplish much in your life, and you'll be able to arrive one day in heaven, and standing at the gates welcoming you can be the fruit of your life.

"Come on, Timothy," said Paul, "you can do it." So can you.