

Our Merciful Savior - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **1 Timothy 1:12-20** (#528)

Introduction: Among all the questions of how best to share the faith, how to grow, and what it looks like to follow Jesus when life is complicated, there is another challenge: how do we keep up our enthusiasm for following Jesus when we don't often get to see the results? The big picture? The results of our work?

Those of you who have work that isn't easily measured know a bit of what this is like. You seem to work more than ever, yet what do you have to show for it? Often, the results aren't readily apparent. While others of you might be blessed with work that has more visible results, I suspect that all of us can relate to the need to keep motivated when results seem lacking. The question is, what shall we do about them? And the answer that I want to give is that we are to *remember what Christ has done personally* so that we can *celebrate Christ's mercy*, which will give us fuel for *holding to sound doctrine*. Those three points are the ones that Paul raises to Timothy in **1 Timothy 1 starting with verse 12...**

1:12-14 We begin by reading Paul's *remembrance of what Christ has done for him personally*. Paul thanks the Lord for calling him to the faith. At the risk of being too obvious, when is the last time you did that? When is the last time you prayed to our Lord, thanking Him for sparing you from what you deserve? From not only the eternal punishment that every one of us deserves, but also for the numerous ways in which your life is on a better trajectory since you came to faith in Him?

Isn't it the case that too many of us are a bit like "Eeyore" from Winnie-the-Pooh? Always thinking that nothing will work out? When this becomes our habit, we begin to see life in distorted terms: we start to miss the work of God's grace in

others, and we forget what He has done – and continues to do – in our own lives. So, alongside Paul, let's see what the Lord has done in his life and in ours...

The Lord appointed Paul – an enemy of the Gospel – to serve Him. Amazing, isn't it? We can't make too much of how Jesus has used Paul. But we also must not fail to see that this shouldn't be so surprising: isn't it the same with all of us? None of us were friends of Jesus before we came to faith. No, our sin and rebellion guaranteed that we were enemies. Like Paul, if you are in Christ today, you too are an enemy made into an ally.

And how did this change happen? It wasn't because Paul got his act together, just as it wasn't on account of you or I being really likable and nice. No, it was because of Christ's mercy on Paul's ignorance and unbelief. Don't misunderstand that word "ignorance." It's not that Paul's sins against Jesus were only because he didn't know better. While sin can be the result of ignorance, that isn't what Paul means, since he had one of the finest educations available at that time. Instead, this kind of ignorance is to not know about Christ's mercy and grace. Paul had a belief that was all law – a belief, by the way, which was not faithful to the Scriptures. Christ's grace changed him, which is what we see in **verse 14**.

What, then, shall we do friends? How can we *remember what Christ has done*? I've already suggested spending time in thankful prayer. Let me add another suggestion: we can remember Christ's work in us is by sharing it with others. I would be the first to agree that too many in our world are focused on their "story" and their "identity." Yet, I will also say that we have an opportunity in these times: if they can share their story, then we can share our story – the record of what Jesus has begun and will complete in us. That might simply be for other Christians, as a

way to encourage them. It also could be evangelistic, sharing with your friends why you have certain hope in an uncertain life. The point is this: make time to share and remember Christ's work in you.

And if we are to *remember*, we should also *celebrate*...

1:15-17 I put these verses under the heading of *celebrating Christ's mercy* because I think that we too often think other parts of His work are more important. But we need to stick with the balance of the Scriptures: we need to talk about justice and grace, yes; and we need to talk about righteousness, of course. But we also need to talk about and enjoy His mercy as well. So, what does Paul write for Timothy to remember and to commend to the church in Ephesus? He reminds Timothy of the mercy of Christ's work on the cross. What does that look like? It is that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..."

The focus is upon Christ's saving work. What was and remains Christ's mission? To save sinners. This is why He came. This is why He lived a perfect life. This is why He underwent the humiliation of dying on the cross, in our place, for our sins when He didn't deserve any such judgment. Which is also why these truths – which the Bible calls "the Gospel" – are absolutely central to the Christian faith.

Yet, in writing this, Paul adds something else: Jesus came to save sinners... and then Paul makes it personal: "...of whom I am the foremost." How do you read that, brothers and sisters? Is it humility? Do you react with a "surely not – he's exaggerating"? I would urge you to take Paul's words at face value: he certainly knew his sins better than you or I. And it's that very knowledge that amazes Paul:

how astounding that God would not only save a sinner like him, but then also call him and use him in such glorious work! Yet it doesn't stop there...

Paul continues with the reason for this amazing mercy to one so bad as he. We might be tempted to think that it is related to Paul's usefulness. That's a very American outlook: very practical and pragmatic, as if to say "well, Paul may have been rotten, but he sure was good at what he did." But the Lord doesn't work that way – you won't find God doing this sort of "ends justify the means" thinking so common in our world. Instead, Paul writes that the point of his salvation was to be a display of Christ's patience given to sinners like him. And when that patience would become known, it would be used to bring others to eternal life as well.

Friends, we don't recognize how deep this truth is. We are afraid to share with others what Christ has done for us – we are afraid of their potential reactions, yes; but I think sometimes we are also afraid of something else: we fear people knowing how truly bad we are. This is why we hesitate to confess sin to others. This is why we keep other people at arm's length. Could it be that something deep inside of us still isn't quite sure that we are fully forgiven? Might it be that the truth we know hasn't quite penetrated all the way down to our heart?

If you read Paul's words here with a bit of unbelief, maybe that is the very challenge that you need for yourself this morning: Paul can clearly speak of his own sin, his own worthlessness apart from Jesus, not because he is trying to seem overly humble, not because he is somehow amazing this side of salvation. No, Paul speaks in such clear terms because he absolutely believes and embraces Christ's work to save him. He knows he is forgiven. And he knows he is forgiven much. This is why he has no fear of sharing how sinful he is: because he wants others to

know that their deepest, darkest, most hidden sins can be forgiven just as his were. That Christ's patience with him can also be patience given to those who see Jesus' work and respond with faith.

Is it any wonder that Paul's conclusion to this thought is to explode into praise? That, as Paul both *remembers* and *celebrates* Christ's mercy, his response is nothing less than a mini worship service, right there in **verse 17**?

Let me call you to the same sort of response: what are your failings? Where are the places that you are weak? In what ways have your sins – forgiven in Christ, if you trust Him – made you different than you would have been otherwise? Yes, there can be such a thing as over-sharing. But, for most of us, we are well into the opposite problem: we never share how much we need Jesus, and so our testimony about His work in our life seems small. Our worship of Him appears to be only a routine. Time to change that: let's celebrate Christ's mercy together by recounting His work for imperfect people like you and I.

Celebrate, remember; now let's conclude with hold: hold to sound doctrine...

1:18-20 This third point might seem to have little connection to the first two, but I'd argue that it flows more clearly and readily than it might seem: if we are *remembering* Christ's work in us and *celebrating His mercy* to not only ourselves, but to sinners everywhere, then what's one major way we can do that remembering and celebrating? Isn't it to hold to what Christ has said – both in the church and as individual Christians? Shouldn't the logical response to Christ's work and mercy be to give our attention and lives to what He has taught? This is Paul's response, which he gives to Timothy in these verses.

This “charge,” which some of your Bibles might translate as “command,” is an order, an exhortation. It could be defined as the marching orders that Paul has left with Timothy to fulfill during his time in Ephesus. This is the mission, as it were. And it is defined back in **verses 3-5**: Timothy’s job is to keep folks from teaching anything that is contrary to love issuing from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Timothy’s job is to ensure that the church in Ephesus majors on the Gospel, rather than every issue or idea that comes along demanding attention.

Timothy, we read, is uniquely qualified for this task. Though “the prophecies previously made about you,” aren’t defined here (I take this as his call to ministry), the point is that – just as Paul was called and tasked by the Lord to spread this Gospel – so is Timothy. By engaging with Paul’s charge, Timothy will rightly engage in the spiritual battle of holding to God’s Word. To not hold to this pattern of sound doctrine, this worthwhile teaching, would be to shipwreck his faith and those of the people who depend upon him. So serious is this that Paul tells Timothy of two who have undergone discipline – not out of spite, but because they were giving themselves to something other than what is true. Sound doctrine matters.

For you and I? As we close, it means this: you need to weigh everything by the Scriptures. It is the filter of what is right and wrong – not your worldly identities, not your politics, not your preferences. And, what’s more, you need to desire a church that holds to the same standards: what we need most is not commentary on the issues of the day. No, what we need is to be reminded of what is true, what is sound, what matters for eternity. If we are to remember what Christ has done and to celebrate His mercy given to us, the way that we continue to do that well is to uphold – even to enjoy – all that He has taught us. Let’s pray for the strength to do that well and to be found faithful...