

# A faithful saying

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[ 0 : 00 ] So we turn now for a little to the chapter that we read in Paul's first epistle to Timothy chapter 1, verse 15.

1 Timothy chapter 1, verse 15. 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.

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first. It might be rendered in me as a chief.

Same word as in the previous verse.

Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him, to life everlasting.

This is one of five statements in the pastoral epistles, Timothy and Titus, which are designated faithful saints.

[ 1 : 16 ] Apparently, sayings that had gained currency in the early church. Some of them dealing with matters of faith.

Some of them dealing with order. Some of them dealing with the day-to-day life of the believer. Some of them dealing with the truth. Some of them dealing with the truth. Some of them dealing with the truth. This is perhaps the way the best known of them all. It is indeed a statement of doctrine.

But it is also a testimony, a personal testimony. It's something that comes from Paul's own experience. It is Paul's teaching concerning the work of Jesus Christ seen in the light of his own experience. He's not just theorizing. He's stating a truth which had burned itself in on his mind more and more as his experience matured. And now here he is getting very near the end of his life for this epistle. This epistle is one of the last epistles which he wrote, written probably after his first imprisonment and before his final imprisonment.

And as he looked back, that gospel which he had proclaimed everywhere he went with such diligence and with such marked success seemed more wonderful to him than ever.

[ 3 : 25 ] The grace of God seemed more amazing to him than ever. But what is grace but favor to the unworthy?

And Paul said to himself, was there ever, ever greater favor shown to anyone so unworthy? 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.

Now maybe some of you will want to take issue with Paul here. I've heard people doing it and one can understand it. Perhaps some of you would like to say to Paul, Oh surely, surely you are exaggerating just a little bit.

You surely can't mean that Paul. You're not the chief of sinners. At your very worst you were sincere even if you were sincerely wrong.

You never descended to any of the things that we would think of as degrading sins. You were never a drunkard. You were never a profligate. You were never dishonest.

[ 4 : 48 ] You never made a false return in all your life. And Paul himself, as you look back on his life, as he thought of his estimate of himself in his early days, he confesses that that's what he thought of himself at that time.

Touching the righteousness which is in the law, he said, I was blameless. Even so, there seemed to have been some twinges of conscience even in those days.

Because you remember how in the epistle to the Romans he said, I had not known sin except the law had said thou shalt not covet. Yes, that brought a measure of conviction.

He realized that God looked on the heart because coveting is a thing that man cannot see. At least not unless we make it very obvious.

But God can see. God looked on the heart and he did realize that things were not quite right with God. But at the same time, he did feel and feel with a certain measure of justification that outwardly his life was beyond reproach.

[ 6 : 02 ] And yet I'm quite sure that in this verse he is not putting on a false humility. I believe that he genuinely felt that what he said was true.

He was a chief of sinners. Now I don't think that we need to take this as a prosaic statement of fact that Paul in actual fact was the greatest sinner who ever lived from the beginning of time.

But I do think that as he looked back over his life and considered his past in the life that God had now given him and that he compared himself to everyone that he knew he felt that no one all things considered no one had sinned as he had done.

But the net result of it all wasn't morbid brooding over his sin. The net result of it all was to make him to magnify the grace of God.

And surely it's a healthy sign if our sight of ourselves as we really are leads us to that conclusion to magnify the grace of God.

[ 7 : 30 ] And that's what Paul is doing here. 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.

And I want in the first place and indeed mainly to think of the depth from which Paul had been saved. What was it in Paul's life that he felt constituted him the chief of sinners?

What were the sins? What were the aggravations of the sins of which he had been guilty? Well I think we can suggest one or two at least. And first and foremost he realized that he had been guilty of blasphemy.

He had been guilty of a sin from which he recoiled by nature in horror. Because nothing could be more abominable, more fearful to a Jew and in particular to a Pharisee than the sin of blasphemy. In the days of his ignorance he had accused he had accused the Christians of blasphemy because they worshipped Jesus as God.

[ 8 : 51 ] He would also have accused Jesus himself of blasphemy because he claimed to be God. And of course if that claim had been untrue he would have been quite right it was blasphemy.

But what Paul omitted to do in what Saul of Tarshish as we know him at that stage omitted to do was this he forgot he forgot to inquire honestly whether those claims might be true.

And later to his surprise he discovered they were true. He discovered that he had been rejecting the Son of God. He had been rejecting God's supreme gift.

He had been rejecting Jesus. And that he now realised was blasphemy as he says in the 13th verse of this chapter who was before a blasphemer a persecutor and injurious.

Oh my friends have you been rejecting Jesus? You may not think of it as blasphemy. But it surely is blasphemy.

[ 10 : 07 ] Of course Paul did it in ignorance. Many of us, most of us don't recognise the sins in our own life for what they are.

And just like Paul we are shocked to the sins of other people. we have a fatal facility for seeing the faults of others and we are extremely blind about our own.

you remember how Paul you remember how Paul you remember how Paul puts it in his argument in the second chapter of the epistle to the Romans we are told.

And we are told thou that sayest thou shalt not steal dost thou steal. Thou that sayest thou shalt not commit adultery dost thou commit adultery.

we need that we need to be enabled by the light of God to see that many of the sins that we see in the lives of others are but the reflection of our own.

[ 11 : 22 ] in the case of Paul it needed a blinding light from heaven a light which blinded him to the world around him to open his eyes to see inside his own heart as God let us see inside our hearts.

And then again he sinned against knowledge. it's true as he says that he did it ignorantly and in unbelief but for all that his ignorance was culpable ignorance.

He ought to have known. He had been brought up on the scriptures of the Old Testament. He had been brought up on the traditions of the Jewish race.

He had shared their expectation of the Messiah and yet he did not recognize him. when he came perhaps you say oh I didn't know I was doing wrong.

I was only doing what everybody else oh well nearly everybody else is doing. Ah yes perhaps you didn't you didn't but you ought to have.

[ 12 : 44 ] You see if we study the word of God more carefully and applied its principles dispassionately to our own lives we would have known. the trouble with us all too often is this that we don't know because we don't want to know.

Offentimes we like what we're doing to put it bluntly we like to sin. We don't admit to ourselves perhaps that it is sin but we like it all the same.

the gambler the drunkard the profligate gets a kick out of what he's doing even although he may be sick afterwards. The man who's out to make financial gain often doesn't stop to consider whether his gain is justly won or not.

and throughout it all we tend to overlook that we have every one of us an inbuilt biased sin which distorts our whole outlook which makes it fatally easy for us to deceive ourselves and for that reason we ought to be doubly careful.

You see sin has entered into our very nature. It's a sound maxim that if you and I are in doubt regarding the rightness of some action we'd better leave it out all together.

[ 14 : 26 ] Not everything we want very much to do is wrong. Not saying that. But there's always if we're in any doubt about something we particularly want to do there's always a very distinct possibility given human nature as it is that it is wrong.

And I think too we may say that Paul not only sinned against knowledge but sinned against his own conscience. oh yes I know he believed that he was acting conscientiously he made himself believe he was acting conscientiously and yet it would appear that he wasn't altogether happy.

He was told that he was kicking against the pricks. I feel that there's a very strong suggestion for example that Paul never forgot his part in the death of Stephen.

He as he heard he probably as he very possibly did hear Stephen's defense of himself he found he with part of his mind I have a feeling that he had a suspicion that Stephen was telling the truth and the vehemence with which he fought against Stephen may have been the reaction a reaction against his own conscience.

I feel that Paul never forgot the face of Stephen as he stood there with his face like the face of an angel but he never forgot even as he was keeping the clothes of those who were stoning him the prayer that Stephen made for his enemies Lord lay not this sin to their charge you remember in that passage that we read in the book of the Acts of the Apostles he says this to the Lord when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed I also was standing by and consenting unto his death I have a feeling that he never forgot that moment and another disturbing factor may very well have been the spread of the gospel and the lack of success of his ardent efforts to quench the flame of the gospel it may be that

[ 17 : 20 ] Paul actually heard his old and revered teacher Gamaliel say in the Jewish council if this council or this work be of men it will come to naught but if it be of God we we cannot fight against lest happen we be found to fight against God and there the stark fact was opened before him that the thing was not coming to note the gospel was prospering in spite of all his efforts to kill it I have a feeling that that that that too must have that that too must have made Paul think but yet in spite of the discomfort of kicking against the pricks of his conscience he was irresistibly driven by the storms of passion that's the nature of sin it's the nature of every kind of sin it blinds the eye to reason at least while the temptation lasts and that's all the devil cares about reason can awake then and stir and torture us with feelings of remorse

Satan knows all too well that the remorse will pass and will be his dupes once again and then again was there not this thought that his sin had affected others no doubt God overruled and God made even the wrath of man to praise him when they were persecuted the Christians scattered and they took the faith with them wherever they went and the persecution only led to the furtherance of the gospel but that wasn't the result that he had intended and while it was true that that's what happened still no doubt there were weak souls who were terrified and who were afraid to confess Christ openly and it may be there were some who actually apostatized let us never forget that whatsoever we do affects other people each one of us each one of us however insignificant we may imagine ourselves to be each one of us as an influence which we just cannot calculate we're either attracting others to

Christ or else putting stumbling blocks in their way that of course is especially true of the Christian and a backsliding Christian can put very severe stumbling blocks very large stumbling blocks in the path of other people but it's true it's true it's true of all that we all have an influence each one of us is helping to constitute the atmosphere in which we live each one of us is either purifying or up

lifting the standards of our purifying and uplifting the standards of our age or else we're pulling them down boldness in sin encourages boldness unbelief encourages unbelief we've heard the story of John Newton the great hymn writer who in his early days was of course a slave trader and in very truth a blasphemer and an atheist is that in those days he got to work on a ship mate who had been brought up in a

Christian home and had persuaded that man that his religion was all nonsense and persuaded him to give up the religion which had been brought up and for all his efforts in later years to bring him back he never could restore the faith that he had once destroyed his influence on other people but not least not least did he realize that his sin was against Jesus Christ why persecute thou me and he realized that the wounds which he had inflicted on the followers of Jesus Christ were felt by Christ as a stake driven into his own flesh and that's the supreme evil of sin when we sin we are driving afresh nails into the hands and feet of the saviour and in particular when we sin in hurting his true followers without cause then we are hurting him we are grieving his heart we are tearing tearing his body the church and

I want us to remember this that this was a mature statement of the apostles it wasn't just something that he felt and said in the heat of those early moments after his conversion on the road to Damascus no doubt he had a blinding vision of himself but that vision passed into a vision of the glory of the saviour he quickly yielded his he quickly yielded his life entirely to him who had met him and who had saved him but as the days went by the horror of this past life did not diminish we've often heard quoted his threefold estimate of himself at different stages of his life first of all right into the

[ 23 : 52 ] Corinthians he says last of all Christ appeared unto me also who am the least of the apostles and I'm not to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God and then in later years he's writing the Ephesians and he says to them to me who am less than the least of all saints less than the least of all saints is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as he looked all around him apostles elders all the rank and file of the church yes he said the least of all saints but now he's coming very near the end of his days and we find him saying this Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief and yet that vision of himself did not drive him to despair but rather did drive him to a clearer appreciation of the salvation and of the savior now let us more briefly think of the ground upon which he believed that he was saved was it that dramatic vision which he had on the road to

Damascus well no doubt that vision did impress him mightily and it accounts for the sudden and revolutionary change in his life no doubt whatever that his conversion was an outstanding conversion a conversion which a moment which came with a shattering impact convicting him of sin and showing him his need and showing him the savior but the important thing in that vision was this not the suddenness of it not the glory of it but the brilliance of the light that shone upon him but this fact that Jesus appeared to him that Jesus brought the message of salvation to him the suddenness of the experience the violence of the experience no doubt were proportionate to

Saul's need nothing else would have awakened him nothing else would have convinced him and nothing else probably would have prepared him for the magnitude of the task that was in store for him but my friends we don't need a vision like what Paul had Christ can speak to you now as you are sitting there in the pew he can open your eyes now that you may see your own need and that you may see his sufficiency to meet all your need it may be a sudden experience or it may be a gradual experience that's not the important thing the important thing is that Jesus Christ should meet with you that Jesus Christ should speak to your heart and what he says to you is this in the gospel he tells you that even one sin is sufficient to bring you to hell sin

I know of course that none of us have committed just one sin sins never come singly sin has entered into our whole nature but one sin is an act of rebellion against God one sin is an evidence of the fact that our hearts are in rebellion against God so one sin is unrepent and unforgiven is sufficient to bring us to hell but on the other hand on the other hand if we turn to him if we turn to him in repentance and trust in his mercy then he forgives not just one sin and not just a few sins when he forgives he forgives all our sins if any of our sins are blotted out at all that all blotted out we have got our clean sheet the blood of Jesus Christ God son cleanses from all sin from all sin the all important thing is not the manner in which the message came to

Paul but the message itself the all important thing is is that was the word of God to his soul Jesus Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and that's what God is saying to us still Jesus said

I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance Jesus said to the man who came to him the son or to the crowd that were assembled the son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins whosoever believeth on the son hath everlasting life will you not take God at his word will you not see Jesus crucified for sinners may God enable him to see him crucified for you for your offenses and take

[ 30 : 10 ] God at his word that whosoever believes in him and yields his or her life to him has everlasting life but finally think for a moment of the purpose for which Paul believed he was saved that he says for this cause I obtained mercy that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering but a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting the purpose as he saw it was this that just as at one time in his life he had encouraged others to evil so now he should be the means of bringing others to the knowledge of Jesus Christ that he might be to all generations a pattern a type of

God's saving power one will help us for a moment to fix our minds upon that word pattern upon one familiar meaning of that word pattern I go along say to a tailor and I want a new suit and he shows me a book of patterns a big thick book of pieces of cloth and I look through them and at last time my eye catches one I say yes well that seems a nice bit of cloth I like the color yes I think I would like that one and the tailor says yes that's a very good that's a very good piece of cloth as a matter of fact it says that's the suit I wearing just now is made of that identical cloth now you see the suit that you get will not be identical with the suit that he is wearing it is made to your measurements not to his and of all the suits that are made of that particular piece of cloth probably not too will be identical and made of the same cloth they're all the different kinds of suit but they're all the same quality now Paul's conversion was a pattern a pattern to encourage others we don't expect to experience conversion in the same manner as he did God suits his dealings to each individual but we will experience the same quality of grace the same degree of mercy the same savior and the same way of salvation for neither is there salvation in any other for there is no other name under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved and so what Paul is saying is this if God through my believing in Jesus Christ saved me then there is no one literally no one for whom salvation is impossible are there any here who say well I don't feel any particular need of salvation

I'm getting on pretty well as I am oh well Paul felt that at one stage in his life but God opened his eyes and God can open your eyes to see your needs he can open your eyes to see your heart as it is in God's sight or at the other end of the scale is that anyone says well I feel I have sinned too deeply no one knows how I have sinned except myself and the devil may try to tempt us as he tempted John Bunyan to think that we have sinned beyond the possibility of salvation well we know how we know how how heinously Paul had sinned we don't know how many people he had people people children of God that he had killed and yet God saved him does anyone say yes there were times when the spirit was working with me but I resisted I resisted

God's pleading it's a very serious thing to resist God's pleading but so I believed it Paul resist God's pleading and yet God in his mercy forgave him all and God made him a new creature a new creature in Christ Jesus are there those here who are still strangers to the grace of God is there anyone here who is humbled by a sense of guilt feels condemned in guilt feels helpless in the power of sin remember this that Jesus who saved Paul is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him may he reveal himself to you may the Holy Spirit of God open your eyes that you may see

[ 35 : 44 ] Jesus not not probably in the dramatic way in which Paul saw him but the same person and just as really and may he enable you to rest in him and in him alone for salvation and then you too will experience for yourself the wonder of that salvation that Paul and millions of others have experienced down through the ages let us pray blessed be thy name oh God for that great salvation that great salvation that saved Paul that has saved millions down through the centuries and we pray thee oh God that thou would work in some hearts here that thou would stir up a holy discontent in in the hearts of sinners that they and fear that they may see whether they are tending and thou open their eyes that they may see that

Jesus is the same yesterday today and forever and may they be enabled by faith to rest in him and with him to enter into newness of life and now thou dismiss us with thy blessing take us in safety to our homes and keep us through the closing hours of this thy day and throughout this week upon which we have entered and accept of us in Christ Amen