

## 1 Timothy 1:12-17 Sept 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013

**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.

We love narratives. I guess telling-a-story has always held wide appeal. But it seems in particular these days that the scale of the most-popular narratives has narrowed. Bring everything down to the small-scale. Tell the story of individuals, and what happened to them – real people, so we can relate. We feel like we are connected then – we're drawn in.

One narrative in the news this past week in particular grabbed my attention. It was Wednesday when I was returning home from dropping off Susan at the Raleigh-Durham airport. Of course, Wednesday was September 11<sup>th</sup>. And pieces of the 9-11 narrative pulled me along. As I made my way back to Fayetteville, I was on another journey – several actually. Real individuals were relaying their place or part amidst the events of 12 years ago.

One person being interviewed shared a reflection that especially stuck with me. In summary he said:

I think our sharing of what happened that day is critically important. We made a promise: "we will never forget." The reason I'm telling now the details of my story from 12 years ago is, in large part, to fulfill that commitment we made. "We will never forget."

As we turn here (indicating the Bible), I see some parallels. Today, our Lord brings everything down to the small-scale for us. He inspired Paul to tell the details of his own individual life-narrative. And yet, along the way, we're led to see our place in the narrative too – this is the magnificent story of God's love to a world of sinners. We'll arrive at very personal application to take with us by the time we're through looking here (indicating the Bible) today.

Paul by inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes: "*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst*" (vs.15) – literally, "*of whom I am the first.*"

As Paul mentions sinners his thoughts immediately turn to himself. When Paul marvels at God's grace displayed to him, all other people shift to the backdrop of his sight. He looks at himself. He is completely honest, and he admits and accepts full responsibility for his sin. He isn't going to try to hide his sin before God, or from anyone else. He states: he is the first among sinners.

Look at how Paul stood before God and you'll see an example for each of us how to stand before God.

Just in your own mind for a moment, evaluate this thought: Each of us should say, “I am the worst of sinners.”

- On hearing that, please don’t attempt to quantify your sin, and compare it to the totals and types you see – or think – others have committed. That’s not what we’re getting at here. Instead,
- If each of us sees ourselves as the first among sinners, as in... standing at the foot of the cross, with all other people shifted to the background, then.... Gone are all excuses that come from comparisons with other people. Gone are all mental gymnastics to elevate myself above anyone else. And we’re left to say: “Here I am, Lord, first among sinners.” “But I praise you, O Christ – you came into the world to save sinners – to save me.”

Here is the most foundational truth in the story of your life and my life: we were shown mercy – Christ took what we deserved... hell – and He gives to us freely what He earned – the grace and faith and love of our Lord Jesus was poured out on us abundantly. As believers in Jesus we have hearts filled with thanks – unending gratitude to him.

All this affects how we then look at everyone else. I only look back at everyone else after an honest look at myself, and after receiving from my Lord & Savior his gifts of life, forgiveness, love, welcome to his family, and a heart changed by His good news.

And my appreciation for God’s undeserved love to me is sustained and renewed daily when I understand this:

Paul says, “*Christ Jesus saves sinners, of whom I am the first.*” He doesn’t simply look back at the past and say that he “*was*” the first among sinners. He recognizes “I am still a sinner, in need of God’s unlimited patience and love.” He not only recalls his past crimes; he also speaks of his every day need of grace.

This keeps everything in proper perspective for us. Each of us can sit here today and shake our heads in marvel. After all, the grace of Jesus is even more overwhelmingly great today than yesterday. For since yesterday we have added new sins, to all the ones before.

I “miss the mark” of the trust, and thanks, and love and service to God that he deserves. Bursts of anger, a tongue which deals its blows, misplaced priorities where God’s position as #1 gets crowded by other interests in our lives. We along with Paul confess: “I *am* a sinner, Lord. I daily miss the mark of your holy, good commands.”

And that’s why our heads just keep shaking in amazement when we hear that Jesus came to save sinners, like you and me. This is what gives us a proper view of the magnitude of God’s patience and love to us. The words in vs.16 are so very comforting. Paul writes: in me, the first among sinners, Christ Jesus displays his “unlimited patience.” God has Paul lay out his own life story as an example to assure us – believers today – of God’s unlimited patience to us. Such patience from God is ours in Christ Jesus.

So Paul leads us onto the only conclusion possible: “*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen*” (vs.17). “Yes! Amen, Paul!”, we say. “I too desire my life-narrative to honor my Savior – to give glory to my King.”

Very practically speaking, let's answer: what way do we see to honor him? As we look at this particular section of God's Word, what way to honor him stands out?

We give him the highest honor as we follow Paul's lead. Paul lays out his narrative. It's honest. It's open. It's authentic & sincere.

Every time we gather here, we take part in telling the same narrative. We are honest. There's openness as we confess our sins. There's authentic and sincere praise from our lips. It flows over from hearts awed at what our Lord has done for us.

Think about the encouragement and witness that such transparency offers. Within these "walls," there is a culture / an environment of openness. We come clean before God; we don't need to hide from one another, or come here wondering 'what will people think if they find out what I'm truly like.' Think about how the telling of your individual narratives brings glory to God, as you encourage one another: *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."*

And we certainly don't want the sharing of our narratives to be held in by the church doors. As you take the news to people of the world, your life story tells: the news of how Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – the news of how you view yourself the first among them – and the news of how anyone else can have the same hope and peace that you enjoy. It is the hope and peace every individual who believes in Jesus enjoys.

You see how our Lord is honored as we tell the narrative of our lives.

I spoke at the beginning of the 9-11 narrative. There was the one individual who highlighted: we will never forget. Man, that's meaningful & moving. But there is an infinitely more important narrative to tell.

Lord, grant that we never forget what you have done for us. Strengthen us to remind one another. Lead us to tell the next generation your saving acts. Carry us into the world, among the nations, as messengers of what you in mercy and grace – have done for us. Amen.

*"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen"*