

## Sermon for June 7, 2026 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

1 Timothy 1:12-17 (EHV)

Theme: **Christ Jesus came to save sinners.**

- 1) He saves the worst
- 2) To make us ambassadors of His best.

*<sup>12</sup>I give thanks to the one who empowered me, namely, Christ Jesus our Lord, that he treated me as trustworthy, appointing me into his ministry. <sup>13</sup>He did this even though formerly I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man. But I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief. <sup>14</sup>The grace of our Lord overflowed on me along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>This saying is trustworthy and worthy of full acceptance: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” of whom I am the worst. <sup>16</sup>But I was shown mercy for this reason: that in me, the worst sinner, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his unlimited patience as an example for those who are going to believe in him, resulting in eternal life. <sup>17</sup>Now to the King eternal, to the immortal, invisible, only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Have you ever asked yourself: “How can God forgive me?” I’ve asked that question many times. How can God forgive me for falling into that pet sin yet again? How can God forgive the lustful, boastful, and uncaring attitude that only He and I know lurks in my heart?

Do you know who else asked himself that question? The apostle Paul, as He reflected on his life before becoming a Christian. But Paul did more than ask the question and wonder. He looked at the undeserved love God showed him in Christ and marvelled – a love that not only saved him but changed him. It changes you, too.

With Paul’s praise to God over what Jesus accomplished in his own life as our guide, let us learn and apply the truth that **Christ Jesus came to save sinners.** 1) He saves the worst, 2) to make us ambassadors of His best.

Part One: He saves the worst.

Oh, the wonderful Gospel of Christ – the mere thought of it moved Paul to reflect upon just how graciously the LORD rescued him from his past. He writes: *<sup>12</sup>I give thanks to the one who empowered me, namely, Christ Jesus our Lord, that he treated me as trustworthy, appointing me into his ministry. <sup>13</sup>He did this even though formerly I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man. But I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief. <sup>14</sup>The grace of our Lord overflowed on me along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

Isn't the apostle exaggerating when he calls himself a *blasphemer, a persecutor, a violent man* and, a little later, the *worst sinner*? How could he – who penned 13 of the 27 books recorded in our New Testament – be any of those things?

Because, before his conversion, the great apostle Paul was neither great, nor an apostle, nor a man named Paul. He was Saul the persecutor, the enemy of Christianity. Listen to how he described his former way of life on another occasion:

*After receiving authority from the chief priests, I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. I often tried to make them blaspheme by punishing them throughout all the synagogues. Because I was so insanely angry with them, I even pursued them to foreign cities.<sup>1</sup>*

Why did Saul hate Christians so much? He tells us in our text: *I acted ignorantly in unbelief*. Understand that Paul is neither trying to excuse nor minimize his sin. He simply explains that he let his barbaric impulses direct his actions instead of seeking to learn the truth.

But then something happened to Saul: while he was on his way to Damascus to imprison more Christians, a blindingly bright light flooded his eyes as a mysterious voice spoke - "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*" Falling to the ground, Saul asked, "*Who are you, Lord?*" *He replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."*<sup>iii</sup> Gripped with terror and an overwhelming sense of guilt, Saul must have thought: "I am doomed - the Jesus I persecuted is the LORD!"

But then something happened that no one could have ever expected. Three days later, as Saul sat blind and contrite in Damascus, the Lord sent a disciple named Ananias – not to condemn Saul, but to reassure him of his forgiveness.<sup>iii</sup> Just think: all of Saul's hatred, the immense pain he caused God's people, all his attempts to destroy not only the bodies of Christians but also their souls – Christ forgave every last sin, having paid for them in full through His cross! And to seal that forgiveness personally, Ananias baptized Saul – clothing him in Christ's righteousness so completely that when God looked at Saul, He no longer saw a persecutor's record but His Son's perfect one.

Paul's story is astonishing. But his story isn't the only one of God's undeserved love. Let me tell you about a baby named Michael - born an absolute enemy of God and doomed to hell. But do you know what happened to this baby? The LORD pitied him to such a degree that he washed him clean from all sins through the sacrament of Holy Baptism and clothed him with the righteousness Christ won for him through His cross. God graciously adopted Michael to be his own child and heir – awakening in him the faith needed to receive all these blessings through the Gospel. Not only that, but the LORD graciously called him to be His ambassador, which is why he stands before you now – pointing you to Christ.

Each one of you has a similar story - one that you can consider more amazing than mine because it happened to you. It's for this very reason that the apostle Paul wrote: <sup>15</sup>*This saying is trustworthy and worthy of full acceptance: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," of whom I am the worst.* Yes, Jesus didn't just come to save the righteous and pretty good. He came to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.

But how could either the Apostle Paul or I claim to be the worst? What about Hitler, Stalin, Mao, or Kim Jong-un - all of whom persecuted far more Christians than Paul could have ever dreamed of? What about drug lords, serial killers, child molesters, and rapists – aren't they far worse sinners than any of us will ever be?

God's answer is: "And what about yourself?" God doesn't compare your sins to others; He judges them alone on the basis of His holy law. The LORD sees the great evils that lie in the deep recesses of every human heart. He sees your secret sins and selfishness. He perceives your dark and rebellious thoughts.

No, the LORD does not judge you in comparison with others. He judges you based on the perfect standard of His law – inviting you to do the same. And when we do that, how can we not confess with the Apostle Paul: "I am the worst"?

And this is good for us to confess. Why? So that the Gospel of God's mercy becomes even more precious to us. Just think: the LORD has mercy on you – a sinner, whose heart is full of sinful lust, greed, selfishness, rebellion, and hate. The LORD graciously forgave and adopted you into His family at your Baptism. At the altar of Holy Communion, He offers you the very body and blood He used to pay for your sins. It is finished – not a single corrupt intention of your heart stands unforgiven. You are at peace with God.

Why? Because Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He came to save you.

### Part Two: Making us ambassadors of His best.

But that's not the only thing Jesus did. He didn't just save us from something. He saved us for something: to be His ambassadors of grace to the world. The Apostle Paul explains:

*<sup>16</sup>But I was shown mercy for this reason: that in me, the worst sinner, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his unlimited patience as an example for those who are going to believe in him, resulting in eternal life.*

Do you know what made the Apostle Paul such an effective witness of Christ in the world? He never forgot how much Christ had done for him. Paul was no longer like other Pharisees, bragging about his good works and condemning others who didn't measure up to his sense of morality. No, realizing he was every bit as deserving of hell as the next person, Paul tirelessly boasted about Jesus and what He did to save him. He showed others the same patient love in word and deed that Christ showed him – praying for everyone with deep emotion, not wanting a single soul lost to hell.

Yes, the forgiving mercy Paul experienced from God compelled him to tell others about Christ.<sup>iv</sup> Doesn't it compel you to do the same?

Even though there are many times in my life when Christ's love has compelled me to faithfully witness His grace, there are many other times when I didn't think about my salvation, thank God for my conversion, or eagerly share the Gospel with others. Why is that? Because I let my eyes fall off Christ and onto the world. Instead of reflecting on what God's Word says, my sinful flesh turns my heart inward – encouraging me to follow my selfish feelings and reasoning instead of what God says in His Word. Don't you notice the same happening in your life, too?

But praise God for His amazing grace: He doesn't leave us in a state of indifference towards His Gospel. Rather, through the preaching of His law, He calls us to acknowledge our sin and repent. Through His Gospel, He reminds us of the love He has for us in Christ. His Spirit moves our hearts to such faith and gratitude that we can't help but want to point people to Jesus. His love compels us to speak the truth to others – calling them to repentance and faith in Christ, that they too might be forgiven.

“But how do I do that?” you might ask. “I am not a trained theologian like you.”

Allow me to tell you a brief story about how you can be an ambassador for Christ.

Back in my seminary days, a female friend of mine told me about another female friend of ours who was living with a man outside of wedlock. Out of concern for her soul, she asked me to talk to her. I responded by saying that it wouldn't be wise because I didn't have firsthand knowledge of the situation. I encouraged her to talk to our friend, but she replied: “I don't know how I can do that because I used to be just like her. I would feel like such a hypocrite.”

I replied, “That makes you the best person to talk to her because you won't approach her with a holier-than-thou attitude. You can speak from a place of experience. You can speak from a place of forgiveness.”

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Do you now understand how Paul's words apply to you? “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom we are the worst. But we were shown mercy for this reason: that in us, the worst sinners, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his unlimited patience as an example for those who are going to believe in him, resulting in eternal life.”

Yes, Christ saved you to save others through you. That is why the world needs to hear from you.

*<sup>17</sup>Now to the King eternal, to the immortal, invisible, only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

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<sup>i</sup> Acts 26:9-11 EHV

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Acts 9:3-5

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. Acts 9:10-19

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14-21