

1 Timothy 1

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you so much. It's good to be with you once again. And I look forward to updating you on my work a bit later.

But before that, we turn to the Word of God. Let's pray. Father, we've sung the words that really sum up the prayer that we want to pray right now, which is that you will speak. We thank you for that truth that when we come to your Word, we're handling what is true and has been true from the dawn of time and will remain true forevermore.

Thank you that we're not here dealing with something fleeting and changing. Thank you that as human fashions change and come and go, your Word and its marvellous truths remain the same forever.

A rock on which we can stand. And we pray then that you will help us now, that you will give us ears to hear and excite our hearts with the wonders of your grace.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Twice in the passage which we read from 1 Timothy chapter 1, the Apostle Paul uses this phrase, I was shown mercy.

[1 : 38] It's in verse 13 and again in verse 16. But in each case, he's making a slightly different emphasis, which we'll come to notice in a moment.

But let's begin by reminding ourselves that mercy is a favourite word in the Bible. That's true at least in the authorised version and the new King James version.

Some of the more modern versions have replaced the word mercy with other equally legitimate translations. But I must say I do like the word mercy.

And when God first introduced himself to Moses, he said, I am. And he defined his name as Jehovah, which is based on the Hebrew for I am.

And a little later, he explained to Moses what the content of that name was. And right at the heart of the Lord's revelation of his own name was this theme of mercy.

[2 : 50] And mercy became a central theme in the praises of God's people. In the Psalms, we hear again and again of mercy, higher than the heavens, reaching to the clouds, because God's people came to know him supremely as the God of mercy.

And here the apostle says, I was shown mercy. Now, if we were going to define the word mercy, I think I would put it like this.

Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve. Because what we deserve from God is judgment and condemnation because of our sin.

But God's a God of mercy. He has made a way to withhold the judgment that our sins deserve. And Paul says, I was shown mercy.

In other words, he's saying, I came to discover God in all the marvelous fullness of who he really is. So, as we ponder this phrase, I was shown mercy, let me first of all ask you, have you received the mercy of God?

[4 : 18] Can you say from the depths of your heart, I was shown mercy? If you can, then my prayer is that as we ponder again this central theme of the gospel, our hearts will be stimulated to praise and thank and worship the God of mercy.

But if, in all honesty, at the moment, you have to say, well, this is strange to me. I know nothing in my personal experience of the mercy of God.

Then my prayer is that God will open your heart and that by the end of this evening you'll be able to say with the apostle, I was shown mercy. So let's look at the first of these two occasions where Paul uses this phrase.

Verse 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.

You notice how Paul begins there by looking back to the kind of person he once was before God's mercy came to him.

[5 : 35] And he uses three terms. He says, I was a blasphemer, a persecutor and a violent man. Now no doubt when Paul was growing up within Judaism as a very loyal and faithful Jew, it would have been the last thing that would ever occur to him that he was a blasphemer.

It was the Gentiles who were the blasphemers. Here he was, a true Jew, a worshipper of the only true and living God. no way would he have seen himself in those days as a blasphemer.

But now he's looking back and he sees things rather differently. Because when the Lord Jesus appeared in this world, the Son of God and his coming was really the apex of God's mercy, Paul initially, like so many of the Jewish people of his own generation, rejected him.

They failed to recognise that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. And with hindsight, now that Paul has come to understand that Jesus Christ actually is the Son of God, he can say, he has to say, to reject him was blasphemy.

And that's what I was. And that led on to the second thing. He was a persecutor. Because he had rejected Jesus Christ, he wanted to destroy belief in Jesus Christ if he could.

[7 : 23] And so whenever he saw Christian believers worshipping Jesus, he added in for them. and you remember the very day on which he was brought to see that Jesus really was the Lord.

He was en route to Damascus to persecute the believers there, to bring them to Jerusalem, to have them thrown into prison. And that was just typical of how he spent his time in those days.

violence. And then he sums that up really in this third phrase where he calls himself a violent man. Now he's not necessarily there or not only there drawing attention to the physical violence which he used against Christians.

He's using a word that speaks of an inner attitude. There was violence in his heart. the word he uses actually was one that could have been used in those days of somebody who was a bit overweight.

And he says as I look back now I can see I was very overweight in my own estimation of myself. I was like an inflated balloon full of violent pride.

[8 : 46] And God had to pop the balloon and show me what I was really like. but even though he says all this was true I was shown mercy.

And you know everyone who can say really genuinely I was shown mercy will have to use that even though that the apostle did.

there is not one of us who can say well of course I was entitled to receive mercy I was so good I was living such a decent life.

Every one of us as we look back to what we used to be if we're Christians now would be able to make a list of three things like the apostle did that summed up the kind of life we used to live.

It might not be the same three things that the apostle mentions we might not have been blasphemers persecutors and violent but maybe your list would say that you were a drug addict you were involved in criminal activity and you were sexually promiscuous or maybe it would say you were full of pride you felt superior to everybody else and you never had an urge to help people in need and to a human perspective those might look like opposite ends of the spectrum but wherever we stand in that spectrum we're all sinners you can sin respectably as well as despicably but it's the same sinful heart that all types of sin come from and even though that's what we were we were shown mercy amazing or maybe you're here tonight and you know in your heart of hearts that your list of three whatever that might be still sums up the way you are because you haven't yet tasted the glory of

[11 : 08] God's mercy in Jesus Christ Paul could say even though that's what I was like I was shown mercy and so may you if you'll only open your hands and receive the mercy that God offers in the Lord Jesus now Paul then uses an interesting phrase he says I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief so is he saying well in my case there were sort of extenuating circumstances I wasn't quite as bad as I might have seemed because I did it ignorantly and I didn't believe in those days now consider this sentence imagine you live in a house or a flat from which you can see the sea quite possible here that one or two of you might and

I don't know what the weather's been like here today but it's been beautiful back home in Thirsk and if it's been like that here you might look out and on the beach you see crowds of people and you turn round and you say to someone the other side of the room it's warm today because there's so many people on the beach you probably don't mean oh congratulations to all those people they've made it warm by going to the beach more more likely you will mean it must be warm today and the evidence is all those people are on the beach same words but a slightly different emphasis and here the apostle is using this phrase because I acted in ignorance and unbelief in the second way he's not saying it's all because of my ignorance and unbelief that

I received mercy and of course because there were mitigating circumstances and I did it ignorantly therefore I was quite entitled to receive mercy no he's saying this I was an ignorant unbeliever and that's the evidence that it had to be mercy and nothing else because in the bible actually ignorance and unbelief aren't just unfortunate things that we can't help we read about an evil heart of unbelief we read of Jesus rebuking his disciples on one occasion for their unbelief we read of our alienation from the life of God because of the ignorance that's in us and what the bible teaches is that we jolly well ought not to be ignorant we ought to know

God we ought to know his truth and if we're ignorant we're guilty of it and we ought to be believers and not to believe is evil so Paul is no way saying I can be excused that's why God showed me mercy no he's saying nothing but mercy would do because I was a sinful ignorant unbeliever and everyone who today is a believer has to say exactly the same thing I wasn't born a believer I was born in my sin and as I grew up I willfully cultivated unbelieving ignorance and then one day the

God of mercy met me I didn't deserve it but I was shown mercy even though I had been what I was mercy has a twin brother mercy never comes on its own it always comes hand in hand with what verse 14 calls the grace of our Lord now there's a slight difference between mercy and grace though they always go together mercy we defined as God not giving us the bad that we deserve grace is the opposite God giving us the good that we don't deserve except that that's a very understated way of putting it because

[16 : 34] Paul says here the grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly so let's try again and put it a bit better mercy is God not giving us the bad that we deserve grace is God lavishing on us showering on us good after good after good that we cannot possibly deserve and it's all as Paul says here in Christ Jesus faith and love that are in him God God God God it's because of the Lord Jesus Christ the life of faith and love that he lived on our behalf that the mercy of God can come to us and if you're here today and you haven't yet experienced God's mercy for yourself then it's to

Jesus Christ you've got to go because the apex of that life that he lived was the cross where he paid the price of our sins where he faced the punishment and bore the punishment that we deserve so that we never have to that's mercy and Paul says I was shown mercy can you say that but let's move on and look at verse 16 where Paul uses this same phrase the second time but he uses it now in a slightly different way in verse 13 he says I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief in other words the fact that I used to be an ignorant unbeliever is the evidence that it was mercy and nothing other than mercy that

I received but now in verse 16 he says there was a reason for me to receive mercy but it's nothing to do with what I was in the past Paul is looking forward now the reason was that in him Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life Paul was shown mercy as an example or a model a pattern a demonstration you know how it is if you want to learn to do something new you would find it very helpful if someone would give you a demonstration show you how it's done present you with a pattern that you can follow if you're interested in cookery for example and you want to learn about

Chinese cooking shall we say you might want someone to come and show you what ingredients you need how to mix them together and you find a cookery demonstration very interesting well that's the kind of idea that the apostle's using here he is the demonstration that God in Christ has placed before the world to show everybody how it works how you can receive mercy and be changed by the mercy of God Paul describes himself in this verse as the worst of sinners people sometimes discuss was Paul saying that because inspired by the Holy Spirit to write those words they are actually at the fact that Paul was the worst sinner who ever lived because he opposed

Jesus Christ and persecuted the church maybe that's so but there are other people who say every one of us if we really understand our sinful heart will inevitably feel I am the worst of sinners and Paul is giving expression to a sentiment that we'll all know when we've seen and tasted the mercy of God maybe that's true as well it's probably one of those situations where you don't have to debate and decide both have got truth in them but the point is that if Jesus Christ can save the worst of sinners then there's hope for any sinner and there's the model the pattern the demonstration that proves it and what it demonstrates is the unlimited patience patience of

[21 : 46] Christ Jesus the word translated patience is made up of two words which mean big and passion the picture is of a blazing fire that's roaring a huge bonfire and the heat the flames are leaping up and Paul's telling us that's what the heart of God is like he has a blazing passion to save sinners nothing can please him more than saving sinners patience and he calls it unlimited patience it's a fire that blazes endlessly there's no way you can damp it down it's the heart of God this blazing passion to save the likes of you and me and you see it in action when you look at the apostle

Paul and that's a great encouragement to every one of us to believe on Jesus Christ and receive eternal life as it says at the end of the verse but you know the wonderful thing is if you're not a believer yet you're not limited to looking at the history books and finding out what happened in the case of the apostle Paul because what happened in his case is duplicated over and over again in the case of every person who has ever found mercy from God so just look around the congregation here tonight and you'll see model after model after model of people who were sinners but can now say to you I was shown mercy and you can say to yourself well if all of them could receive this mercy if

God's patience was long enough and strong enough for all of them well I can come I can be shown mercy there's hope for me of course it might be that somebody looks at Christian people today and thinks I could never be that good I could never live a life like that there's no hope for me if that's what it is to be a Christian but you mustn't forget the even though we weren't always like that the mercy of God changes us and you can be changed whatever you may be by believing on him and receiving eternal life that's the great hope that's held before us in the gospel eternal life the life that overturns death we have to remember here that death is the ultimate punishment for our sin we die because we're sinners and if we die in our sins it leads into a death that is an endless experience of dying without end but in

Christ there's eternal life we believe so the invitation in what the apostle says here in verse 16 is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you can see the pattern in Paul and in every believer who's ever lived and you can say God's blazing passion desires to save me and I put my trust in

Jesus Christ because believing you see in the Bible it's not just saying oh I believe it's not a casual thing James tells us even the demons believe like that and they tremble when they think the judgment that's coming to them to believe is to entrust yourself to Christ to pin your hopes on what Christ has done to rely on him not on yourself to save you to commit your eternity into his hands and they are safe hands indeed so can you say I was shown mercy if you can this passage gives us two reminders of how we ought to respond in verse 12 Paul says

[27 : 29] I thank Christ Jesus our Lord he doesn't congratulate himself on having taken mercy from God he doesn't imagine that he was a better specimen than most he says I was the worst of sinners but Christ Jesus our Lord has saved me has changed me he has done it I thank him and if you're a Christian you've received mercy from God that's the only way you can respond thanks be to Christ Jesus our Lord no credit to me all glory to him and the other indication comes in the final verse of the passage we read verse 17 where Paul has this doxology now to the king eternal immortal invisible the only

God be honour and glory for ever and ever amen that's the other way we must respond when we've received God's mercy honour and glory to God salvation is of the Lord we're saved because of him not because of ourselves all the honour all the glory is his and if you can't as yet say I was shown mercy well let me say again the instruction the command in this passage is believe on Jesus Christ and receive eternal life the promise tied to the command and you can see the pattern in Paul in any believer you know God has a burning desire to save sinners if you know you're a sinner you can receive mercy believe trust yourself to him let's pray oh God our father we do indeed give honour and glory to your name and thanks to our

Lord Jesus Christ for the mercy shown to us we acknowledge afresh that all our hope is in Christ and all the credit for our salvation goes to you the triune God and we pray oh God that by your Holy Spirit you will enable each of us to respond appropriately to this word from your word and if there's anybody who has not yet been shown mercy open Lord their hearts we pray to receive it even now and we pray in Jesus name Amen