

Sermon

September 14, 2025

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Christ's Mercy in His Death and Resurrection for the Chief of Sinners

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours through God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the shadow of the cross and the light of the empty tomb, we find the heart of the gospel: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. This truth shines brightly in the life of Saul of Tarsus, transformed into Paul, the apostle, as recorded in 1 Timothy 1:12-17. His story is no mere historical account but a testament to the power of Christ's death and resurrection, which conquers sin and offers mercy to even the chief of sinners. Through Paul's transformation, we see the boundless mercy of Jesus, who bore the cross to forgive, rose to give life, and calls every heart—no matter how dark—to Himself. Let us explore this passage, anchoring it in the reality of Christ's sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection, and find hope for our own redemption.

Strength Through Christ's Sacrifice (1 Timothy 1:12-13)

Paul writes, *"I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief."*

Picture Saul, a man consumed by rage, hunting Christians with a zeal that left blood on his hands (Acts 8:3). He was no passive skeptic but an enemy of the cross, seeking to destroy the church of the crucified Christ. Yet, on the road to Damascus, the risen Jesus met him—not with judgment but with mercy (Acts 9:3-6). The strength Paul received was not his own; it was the power of Christ's resurrection, which broke the chains of his sin. The cross, where Jesus bore the weight of Paul's blasphemy, became the source of his forgiveness. The empty tomb, where death was defeated, became the foundation of his new life as an apostle.

Consider King Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33). His reign was a catalog of horrors—idolatry, child sacrifice, and rebellion against God. Bound in chains by the Assyrians, he seemed beyond hope. Yet, in his desperation, he cried out to the God who had

died for sinners. The mercy that flowed from the cross reached even Manasseh, restoring him to his throne and transforming his heart. Like Paul, his story points to the cross, where Jesus' blood cleanses the vilest offender, and the resurrection, which offers new life to the repentant.

This is the power of Christ's death and resurrection: they take the hardest hearts and make them vessels of God's purpose. No sin is too great for the cross to forgive, no life too broken for the resurrection to renew.

Grace Overflowing from the Cross (1 Timothy 1:14)

Paul continues, *"and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."* The Greek word *hyperepleonasen* suggests a deluge of grace, a flood that overwhelms sin. This grace flows directly from the cross, where Jesus poured out His life to atone for sinners, and from the resurrection, where He triumphed to share His life with us. For Paul, this grace did not merely forgive; it transformed a persecutor into a preacher, filling him with faith to trust Christ and love to serve His church.

Recall Zacchaeus, the tax collector (Luke 19:1-10). Despised for his greed, he climbed a tree to see Jesus, perhaps hoping for a glimpse of hope. Jesus, who would soon hang on a cross for sinners like Zacchaeus, looked up and called him by name: "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." In that moment, the grace of the coming cross flooded Zacchaeus' heart. He repented, promising to give half his wealth to the poor and restore fourfold anyone he had cheated. Jesus declared, "Today salvation has come to this house." The grace that flowed from Christ's death washed away Zacchaeus' guilt, and the promise of resurrection filled him with faith and love. So it is with us: the cross forgives our past, and the resurrection empowers us to live anew, overflowing with faith and love.

The Trustworthy Saying Rooted in Christ's Work (1 Timothy 1:15)

Paul proclaims, *"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."* This is the gospel in a sentence, grounded in the cross and resurrection. Jesus came to die for sinners, taking their punishment on the cross, and rose to offer eternal life

to all who believe. Paul calls himself the “chief” sinner—not “I was,” but “I am,” acknowledging his ongoing need for grace. If Christ’s death and resurrection can save the foremost sinner, then no one is beyond His reach.

Think of the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43). Nailed beside Jesus, he had no good deeds to offer, no time to make amends. Yet, as Jesus hung dying for the world’s sins, the thief turned to Him: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” In that moment, faith in the crucified and soon-to-be-risen Lord was enough. Jesus promised, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” The cross bore the thief’s guilt; the resurrection secured his hope. This is the heart of the gospel: Christ’s death pays for our sins, and His resurrection guarantees our salvation, received by faith alone.

Christ’s Patience as a Pattern (1 Timothy 1:16)

Paul explains, *“But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”* The Greek *makrothymia*—long-suffering patience—reflects Christ’s enduring love, seen in His willingness to die for sinners and rise to call them to Himself. Paul, who once ravaged the church, became a living example of this patience. Christ waited, pursued, and transformed him, making his life a pattern for all believers. The cross shows the depth of God’s love; the resurrection proves its power to save.

Consider Ambrose of Milan in the fourth century. A Roman governor steeped in worldly power, he resisted God’s call to become a bishop. Yet, the Christ who died and rose again pursued him with relentless patience. Ambrose surrendered, was baptized, and became a defender of the faith, his life a testimony to the transformative power of Christ’s work. Like Paul, his story assures us: no resistance is too strong for the Savior who conquered death.

Doxology to the Risen King (1 Timothy 1:17)

Paul erupts in praise: *“To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”* This doxology flows from a heart overwhelmed by the mercy of the crucified and risen Christ. The God who died for sinners and rose to give them life is worthy of eternal worship. Every story of

redemption—Paul's, Manasseh's, Zacchaeus', the thief's, Ambrose's, and yours—reflects the glory of the cross and the power of the empty tomb.

What does this mean for us? Christ's death on the cross paid the price for every sin, no matter how great. His resurrection guarantees new life for all who believe. His mercy transforms the unworthy, His grace overflows with faith and love, and His patience endures to draw us to eternal life. The cross and resurrection are not distant events but the living power that softens hardened hearts, rebuilds broken lives, and turns sinners into saints. Today, rest in this truth: Christ's mercy, won through His death and sealed by His resurrection, is yours. His patience knows no bounds, and His grace is sufficient to save you.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.

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