



Please turn to the NT book of 1 Timothy (p. 932, pew Bible). I'm excited about this new sermon series. Paul's letters to Timothy have encouraged me throughout my lifetime, more than half of which I have been a pastor. Paul wrote this letter to a pastor, but in a sense he wrote it *through* the pastor for the whole church. We know this because Paul concludes his letter by saying, "Grace be with you" (1 Tim. 6:21) – and the "you" is plural.

That's how Paul ends his letter, and he begins it on a similar note – a strong note:

A GREETING WORTH REPEATING
1 Timothy 1:1-2

It's worth repeating because Paul begins by emphasizing the blessings of salvation.

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope.

² To Timothy, my true child in the faith:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

- 1 Timothy 1:1-2

Years ago at a Bible conference I met former tennis pro David Wheaton and his wife Brodie, who became good friends. During one of the conference meals, Brodie and I jokingly lamented over how easily David stays fit and trim. Brodie said, "The difference between David and us is that he *eats to live*, whereas we *live to eat!*"

As I thought about that, it occurred to me that when it comes to the gospel, believers get to do both! We not only *feed on the gospel to live*, but we also *live to feed on the gospel!*

***A healthy church thrives
on the blessings of salvation.***

As I mulled over today's sermon text, I prayed, "God, make us gospel gluttons! Give us a voracious appetite for all the limitless resources you have lavished on us in Christ!"

The apostle Paul had such an appetite. That's because he knew that the whole direction of his life and his eternal destiny had been radically and fantastically changed by the God who had rescued him from his hell-bound ways. In verses 12-17 Paul writes,

¹² I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me

with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Did you catch the themes of grace and mercy running throughout Paul's testimony? The key takeaway is that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Paul says, "I'm proof – Public Sinner #1 – that God saves the very worst. If he saved me, he'll save you too – if you'll only trust him." This is *Good News*, is it not?

That's the news that Paul was commissioned to preach. He was not only *saved* by God but was also *sent* by God to *speak* for God. The word *apostle* literally means: "sent one." To qualify as an apostle, one had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. There was more to being an apostle than this, but not less. Paul met this qualification, for he had encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus in Acts 9. A few days later he was commissioned by the Lord, who said of Paul, "He is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings and to the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Basically, everybody! Jews and Gentiles, commoners and kings!

Paul says he is an apostle "by command of God."¹ This formula "*by command of*" was used on official notices, meaning "by order of." It indicates "a royal command which must be obeyed."² Paul didn't march to the beat of his own drum, and he didn't get his marching orders from the church. He got them directly from "God our Savior and ... Christ Jesus our hope." So, Paul's statement in verse 1 is an assertion not only of his authority, but also of Jesus' deity. "A command from the Father is also said to be a command from the Son, and vice versa. Therefore, the Son must be equal in power and authority to the Father. Jesus is God."³

Do you believe that? Do you believe that Jesus is God-in-the-flesh, who came to earth and lived as a perfect human in your place, suffered the penalty your sins deserved, and rose from the dead so that you could be fully cleansed, forgiven, and have eternal life? Have you admitted your guilt before God and asked him to save you? If not, why not? The Lord has promised to save every person who calls on him. Don't delay. Do it now. Then you, like Paul, will say, "All honor and glory to God forever and ever!"

Paul could have referred to God the Father and Christ Jesus in any number of ways, but he deliberately chooses the designations "God our Savior" and "Christ Jesus our hope." Could there be, for sinners like us, any better designations for God? The highest authority on heaven and earth exercises his sovereign power for our good.

¹ This is the only greeting in all of Paul's letters in which he iterates that "his apostolic position was due to divine command." R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chappell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word*, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 20.

² John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*, *The Bible Speaks Today*, edited by J. A. Motyer and John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1996), 39

³ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, *Reformed Expository Commentary*, series editors Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken, New Testament editor Daniel M. Doriani (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 4.

- Remember what the virgin Mary said after Gabriel told her that she had found favor with God and would give birth to God's Son? She said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). Mary knew that Jesus' birth was a fulfillment of God's promise to save his people (Matt. 1:21). So now Paul uses the phrase "God our Savior" to point us back to the salvation God has accomplished for us through Christ. As one commentator puts it, "Paul was not sent by some nameless deity. He reminded Timothy and all who hear this letter that the God he serves is the saving God of the Scriptures."⁴
- His Son is "Christ Jesus our hope." This phrase provides further encouragement because it points us both to the future and to a person – the Lord Jesus Christ. "The Greek word translated *hope* (*elpis*), used in a Christian sense, conveys an element of absolute certainty,"⁵ a "fully confident expectation"⁶ that Jesus will always come through for us, and one day he will come back for us (Titus 2:13).

So, Paul's letter begins on an authoritative note but also a confident, encouraging note. This is important because Paul will be dealing with some difficult issues in the church. But the pastor and the church can face these head-on because God is their Savior and Christ Jesus is their hope.

- ⇒ So often we set ourselves up for disappointment because we place our hope in something or someone other than Christ, thinking that this person or this situation will bring us joy and satisfaction. Then when things don't work out the way we had hoped, we get frustrated, discouraged, or depressed.
- ⇒ Perhaps you can think of someone or a situation right now that got you into such a state. Don't let the lesson be lost on you. Stop looking to people and situations and things to satisfy you. Look to Jesus. "For the Scriptures tell us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed" (Rom. 10:4 TLB).

Healthy Christians and healthy churches thrive on the blessings of salvation!

Because this is true, Paul begins on a note of Christ-centered confidence and encouragement for the sake of the one to whom he was writing. The recipient is identified in the first part of verse two: "To Timothy, my true child in the faith."

Clearly, Paul had a close relationship with Timothy, who had become like a son to him. The first time Timothy is mentioned in the New Testament is at the beginning of Acts 16, where Luke the historian recounts the early phases of Paul's 2nd missionary journey. At this point in his expedition, Paul is in what is now south-central Turkey. Luke writes,

¹ Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. ² The

⁴ David Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, edited by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2013), 9.

⁵ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 14, gen. ed. Leon Morris (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 70.

⁶ Hughes and Chappell, 21.

believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³ Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they traveled from town to town, ... the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

- Acts 16:1-4a, 5 NIV

Paul had traveled to Lystra on his 1st missionary journey about a year earlier and had preached the gospel there. But some Jews who hated Paul for preaching that Jesus is the Messiah had followed him to Lystra and had persuaded the crowds to stone him, which they did. Paul was dragged out of the city, presumed to be dead. "But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city" (Acts 14:20). It may seem that in addition to being a glutton for the gospel, Paul was also a glutton for punishment! No, it was the love of Christ that compelled him to go back into the city. The next day he continued his journey and kept on preaching the gospel in other cities.

The main purpose of Paul's 2nd missionary journey was to go back and visit the believers in all the towns where they had preached the word of the Lord, to see how they were doing (Acts 15:36). When Paul got to Lystra, the believers there had good things to say about Timothy. Perhaps Paul during his 1st missionary journey had led Timothy to faith in Christ and then by the time Paul returned to Lystra a year later, Timothy had matured greatly.

So Paul took Timothy with him and the Lord blessed their ministry greatly. Timothy became Paul's faithful travel companion and co-worker. In addition to their ministry of evangelism and discipleship, they collaborated to write six books of the New Testament. The letters of 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon come from Paul *and* Timothy, though Paul of course was the primary writer.

Later during Paul's 2nd missionary journey, he and Timothy arrived in Ephesus where they preached the gospel and planted a church. Shortly thereafter, Paul revisited the believers there for what he knew would be the last time. It was an emotional farewell. In those precious final moments together, Paul exhorted the elders of the church, saying,

²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

³² "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

- Acts 20:28-32 NIV

By the time we get to the end of Acts, Paul is imprisoned in Rome (Acts 28:30-31), and Timothy is by his side (Phil. 2:19). On that occasion Paul writes to the church at Philippi, "I have no one like him. ... But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel" (Phil. 2:20, 22). We know from Hebrews 13:23 that at some point Timothy also spent some time in prison.

About the time Paul is released from prison, he sends Timothy back to Ephesus to be his pastoral representative. By that time Paul's prediction has come true – false teachers have infiltrated the church, and it's Timothy's job to confront them (vv. 3-11).

We know from Paul's letters to Timothy that he had the gift of teaching (1 Tim. 4:13-14), but he was also young (1 Tim. 4:12) and timid (2 Tim. 1:7). Earlier Paul had exhorted the church at Corinth, "When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am" (1 Cor. 16:10). Timothy was committed to doing the Lord's work, but he wasn't by nature a "missionary commando" like Paul.⁷ It seems that Timothy had "a fragile constitution and nagging stomach problems, for later in this letter Paul says, "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent ailments" (1 Tim. 5:23). My guess is that Timothy's bodily ailments were aggravated by stressful situations in ministry. He was determined to be faithful, but he could also become somewhat fretful and tearful when facing difficult circumstances and difficult people. Near the beginning of his next letter to Timothy, Paul would write, "As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy" (2 Tim. 1:4).

⇒ Timothy has always been one of my favorite Bible characters. I admire Paul, but I more easily relate to Timothy. I think that's why I find Timothy so endearing.

Since Timothy's mother was Jewish but his father was a Greek (Acts 16:1), orthodox Jews would have considered Timothy to be an illegitimate child,⁸ but Paul refers to him as "my true (genuine) child in the faith" (v. 2a). This was meant not only to encourage Timothy but to show the church that Timothy has Paul's stamp of approval. This is important because Paul is an apostle by command of God and Jesus Christ.

Because Timothy had true faith, he was not only Paul's child, but he was God's child. This is the greatest privilege of all, and it belongs to every believer. The apostle John wrote, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 John 3:1). Because God loves to give good gifts to his children, Paul bestows a triple blessing on Timothy in the form of a prayer-wish: "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."

Grace

The standard pagan greeting was *charein*, a Greek word that means "Greetings!" But Paul Christianized it by substituting it with another Greek word, *charis*, which means "Grace!"

"Greetings!" <i>(charein)</i>	"Grace!" <i>(charis)</i>
----------------------------------	-----------------------------

Grace is God's undeserved kindness to sinners (Eph. 2:8). But this goes beyond *saving* grace. It also includes *sustaining* grace for God's children amid the challenges of life.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

John 1:16 says, “from his fullness [the fullness of Christ] we have all received, grace upon grace.” Think of the ocean surf – one wave after another in endless succession. Such is the grace of God toward his children. Romans 8:32 says, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” F. F. Bruce wrote, “There is no limit to the supply of grace which God has placed at his people’s disposal in Christ.”⁹

Mercy

Mercy carries the idea of God’s special care for a person in need. The Old Testament equivalent of this word (*hesed*) denotes the steadfast love of the Lord that undergirds his covenant with his people. In the OT book of Lamentations, which was written after the destruction of Jerusalem as an act of the Lord’s discipline, the poet expresses his sorrow and suffering after the destruction of Jerusalem. But in the midst of his sorrow, he is sure that the Lord will once again be show mercy to his people. He says,

“My soul continually remembers [my affliction and my wanderings] and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope”:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
His mercies never come to an end;
They are new every morning;
Great is your faithfulness.

“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”

- Lamentaions 3:20-24

As sinners, we stand in constant need of God’s mercy. We also stand in need of it as God’s servants, too. Paul’s typical greeting in his NT letters is “Grace and peace.” But only in his greeting in his letters to Timothy does he add the word “mercy” in the middle. That’s because Timothy was in a tough situation that would bring him to his knees, to the end of himself, but there God’s special care would be his.”¹⁰

Peace

“Peace” is first and foremost peace with God (Rom. 5:1), but it also entails inner peace from God. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27). The peace that the world gives is dependent on life’s circumstances. But Jesus gives a far superior peace: the well-being that results from being in a right relationship with him – a peace that is always present regardless of our circumstances.

One commentator reminds us, “God’s dealings with His people are full of grace, mercy, and peace. That’s good news for those who are still battling sin, which is all of us.”¹¹

⁹ Cited by David Jeremiah in *Turning Point* [online]. Accessed 23 August 2018 at <https://www.oneplace.com/ministries/turning-point/read/articles/grace-upon-grace-16941.html>; Internet.

¹⁰ Hughes and Chappell, 23.

¹¹ Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary*, 10.

That's why the opening lines of Paul's letter to Timothy is a *greeting worth repeating*. As I thought about this triple blessing of "grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord," the words of an old hymn came to mind that mentions all three. I had the words to this hymn posted for the better part of a decade right next to my desk on the bulletin board in my old office down in the church basement. These words remind me that the Lord not only saves me by his grace, mercy and peace, but he also *sustains* me.

*He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength as our labors increase;
To added afflictions he addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials he multiplies peace.*

*His love has not limits, His grace has no measure,
His power [has] no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.*