

I.N.I.

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

Nov. 13, 2011

I Timothy 1:12-17

In Christ Jesus, the Savior Who came to save sinners like you and me, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In the six verses that make up our sermon text this morning, the Apostle Paul briefly summarizes his calling as a Christian and as a missionary for Christ. He does this, not to brag about himself, but to strengthen the young pastor Timothy in his calling. Paul is reminding Timothy that he (Timothy) had not chosen the position and calling that he had, rather, Timothy had been appointed to that position by Christ. The same goes for Paul in his ministry. So Paul is encouraging Timothy to see himself in his (Paul's) story. And that is our theme for this morning. We pray the Holy Spirit lead us to

### **SEE OURSELF IN PAUL'S LIFE-STORY**

First of all to see our self as

#### **I: CHIEF OF SINNERS**

We read again vs. 12-13, 15-16 **AND I THANK CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD WHO HAS ENABLED ME, BECAUSE HE COUNTED ME FAITHFUL, PUTTING ME INTO THE MINISTRY, ALTHOUGH I WAS FORMERLY A BLASPHEMER, A PERSECUTOR, AND AN INSOLENT MAN; BUT I OBTAINED MERCY BECAUSE I DID IT IGNORANTLY IN UNBELIEF...THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING AND WORTHY OF ALL ACCEPTANCE, THAT CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS, OF WHOM I AM CHIEF. HOWEVER, FOR THIS REASON I OBTAINED MERCY, THAT IN ME FIRST JESUS CHRIST MIGHT SHOW ALL LONGSUFFERING, AS A PATTERN TO THOSE WHO ARE GOING TO BELIEVE ON HIM FOR EVERLASTING LIFE.**

Paul could only marvel at the fact that he had been chosen by God to be His spokesman, His herald, His ambassador. What more unlikely candidate could you have found? Paul was one who blasphemed and slandered Christ, persecuted Christians, was a violent person in his actions toward any who professed faith in the Lord Jesus.

Let's let Paul tell us in his own words what he was like prior to his conversion. We read in Acts 26:9-11 **INDEED, I MYSELF THOUGHT I MUST DO MANY THINGS CONTRARY TO THE NAME OF JESUS OF NAZARETH. THIS I ALSO DID IN JERUSALEM, AND MANY OF THE SAINTS I SHUT UP IN PRISON, HAVING RECEIVED AUTHORITY FROM THE CHIEF PRIESTS; AND WHEN THEY WERE PUT TO DEATH, I CAST MY VOTE AGAINST THEM. AND I PUNISHED THEM OFTEN IN EVERY SYNAGOGUE AND COMPELLED THEM TO BLASPHEME; AND BEING EXCEEDINGLY ENRAGED AGAINST THEM, I PERSECUTED THEM EVEN TO FOREIGN CITIES.** Paul had been conducting an all-out war against Christ and Christianity. He was zealous in his hatred for the Way as it was called. He thought he was doing a service to Jehovah.

Paul is not trying to excuse himself when he wrote **"I DID IT IGNORANTLY THROUGH UNBELIEF."** He is simply saying he was convinced that what he was doing was right. He followed his conscience, misguided as it was, in unbelief and ignorance. That did not make his actions any less wicked or his words any less blasphemous, but the Lord showed mercy on him in his ignorance and enlightened him to see the truth.

It is no wonder that in the midst of this story of himself Paul boldly proclaims **THIS IS A FAITHFUL (TRUSTWORTHY) SAYING AND WORTHY OF ALL ACCEPTANCE: CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS!** What an amazing statement! A statement that we sinners can totally rely on as being trustworthy and true.

As Paul meditates on the statement he has just written he thinks of himself and humbly declares **OF WHOM I AM CHIEF.** Who but the person himself really knows his own sinful heart? We may see and hear about the outward sins of others, but only we know the real corruption that lives within ourselves. We daily see our arrogant thoughts; our selfish, self-centered feelings; our lustful, immoral desires; our doubts and worries; our vengeful and angry emotions. We hear our profane and godless words. If we are honest with ourselves we will all have to admit that we are so far from perfect, holy, selfless feelings, thoughts, desires and actions that we are indeed **CHIEF OF SINNERS.**

When we are crushed with the Law we no longer make excuses for our failures, no longer compare ourselves to others ("look at them, look at the terrible things they have done. I'm not as bad as they are"). No, in the long list of sinners, we stand at the head of the list.

Paul considered himself chief of sinners for he had rebelled against the true God, sought to destroy Jesus' saving name, had subverted faith and the Gospel, and robbed sinners of their heavenly treasure. He cites his own example as the most compelling evidence of the Savior's power to save sinners.

Paul had said of himself that he was **THE LEAST OF THE APOSTLES AND DID NOT EVEN DESERVE TO BE CALLED AN APOSTLE** and again he said of himself that he was **LESS THAN THE LEAST OF ALL GOD'S PEOPLE.**

When we see God's great grace next to our own unrighteousness and wretched sinfulness we too are filled with humility. We look to ourselves and we see nothing but sin, guilt and deserved damnation, we look to Jesus and we see free and full forgiveness and the gift of life.

Paul says that his life would be a pattern of many lives to come---If Paul, the chief of sinners, can be saved through the Lord Jesus' grace and longsuffering patience than anyone can. Peter says the Lord **IS LONGSUFFERING (PATIENT) TOWARD US, NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH BUT THAT ALL SHOULD COME TO REPENTANCE.**

The Law leads us to see ourselves as **CHIEF OF SINNERS,** but thankfully through the Gospel we also see ourselves as Paul did

## **II: CHOSEN BY GRACE &**

### **III: THE OBJECT OF CHRIST'S PATIENT LOVE**

Paul writes **I OBTAINED MERCY...AND THE GRACE OF OUR LORD WAS EXCEEDINGLY ABUNDANT, WITH FAITH AND LOVE WHICH ARE IN CHRIST JESUS.** What an example Paul's life was of the patient grace and mercy of God! When we contemplate and meditate on our own sins, what patience we see God has shown toward us! We too were conceived and born in sin, dead in unbelief, enemies of God. But like Paul, we too have been declared **NOT GUILTY** alone through Jesus Christ's perfect obedient life and His suffering, death and resurrection from the dead. We have been chosen alone by God's grace and in time have become the object of Christ's patient love as He called us through the Gospel. For many of us that call came very early in our life at our infant baptisms. For others it was in your youth, maybe early adulthood, or for some maybe in your later years.

When we have received this grace and mercy in Christ, as Paul says **ABUNDANTLY** (literally like a cup that has been filled and is overflowing), then we will be moved to tell other sinners. Paul writes, **AND I THANK CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD WHO HAS ENABLED ME...** Paul is

telling Timothy and us that the Lord Jesus had given him all the strength and ability to do his work in the ministry. It was this same Paul who wrote to the Philippians **I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME**. Our competence in the public ministry of God's Word or in our personal ministries using God's Word for others comes only from the Lord.

Paul says that it was Jesus who **PUT ME INTO THE MINISTRY**. Paul is recounting his conversion and quotes the words of Jesus to him on the road to Damascus. In Acts 26:16 Jesus says to Paul, **FOR I HAVE APPEARED TO YOU FOR THIS PURPOSE, TO MAKE YOU A MINISTER AND A WITNESS BOTH OF THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE SEEN AND OF THE THINGS WHICH I WILL YET REVEAL TO YOU**.

God has called me into this same ministry and God has called you to support that ministry with your prayers, your gifts, your offerings and your own voices by proclaiming the Word to others as well. We are all witnesses and ambassadors to proclaim the Good News of Jesus so that people will be delivered **FROM THE POWER OF SATAN TO GOD, AND THAT THEY MAY RECEIVE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND AN INHERITANCE AMONG THOSE WHO ARE SANCTIFIED IN CHRIST**. What a shame if on our part we show a lack of zeal in our mission to reach the unbelievers.

That brings us to the fourth part of our theme. May the Holy Spirit lead us to be

#### **IV: GRATEFUL IN HIS SERVICE**

Paul writes in our last verse, **NOW TO THE KING ETERNAL, IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE, TO GOD WHO ALONE IS WISE, BE HONOR AND GLORY FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN**.

God had turned what was worst in Paul, being **CHIEF OF SINNERS** into a useful purpose, being His **CHIEF MISSIONARY** to the Gentiles. As Paul thinks about all of this he breaks out into a song of praise to the Lord God. The false teachers of Paul's day that preached that the people must keep the law in order to be saved together with faith in Christ, robbed Jesus of the glory that was His alone. Faith and trust that leans and relies on Jesus alone for salvation, faith that says "**NOTHING IN MY HAND I BRING, SIMPLY TO THY CROSS I CLING,**" such faith honors and glorifies the eternal, immortal, invisible King of heaven and earth. Through Jesus' blood and righteousness we will live throughout all eternity in joyful praise to our heavenly King.

In reality Paul's story is not so different from yours, or mine or Timothy's. We have been shown from God's unchanging Law we are **CHIEF OF SINNERS**, no excuses, no comparisons to others. Like Paul and Timothy we have been **CHOSEN BY GOD'S GRACE AS OBJECTS OF CHRIST'S PATIENT LOVE**. And like Paul and Timothy we will spread that same word to others **GRATEFUL TO BE IN HIS SERVICE** and thereby glorifying and praising our Savior's name now and throughout all eternity.

Amen.