

Ancient Advice for a Modern World: Rooted in Grace

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1 Timothy 1:12-17

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I want to play a little game this morning

- of fill in the blank.

- I'll start a phrase, - -

- and you finish it.

- So for example,

- If we were at the football game yesterday

- and someone yelled,

“Let's Go,”

- you'd say “Hokies.”

- OK,

- you see how this goes - - -

- so if I say,

“Jesus loves me this I”

- “know for the Bible tells me so.”

- How about -

- “Go and make disciples of”

“all nations.”

- Alright two more –

- “The Lord is my”

“Shepherd”

- and finally from our reading today

-“Christ Jesus came into the world to save”

“Sinners.”

- Notice it doesn't say

- Jesus came to save holy people, - -

- or mostly good and decent people, - -

- or rich people

- or poor people.

- No, it says, - -

- Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Now I realize

- that sinner

- isn't a word that gets used very much in the world today.

- Even though it simply means - -

- one who acts in a way that is contrary to God's desires or law,

- it's a description that Christians don't like to use to describe ourselves,

- because it reminds us that we aren't perfect

- and that no matter how hard we try

- we can't be perfect in following God.

- It's a description

- that non-Christians don't like to use

- or have used to describe them, -

- because it implies a judgement about their lives

- based on a set of values

- they may or may not agree with.

- Nonetheless,

- here it is clearly stated, - -

- Jesus came to save sinners.

- Jesus came to save the people who have lied and cheated.

- Jesus came to save the people

- who have been poor spouses or parents.

- Jesus came to save the people who have partied to much

- and the people who have refused to show hospitality to the stranger.

- Jesus came to save the people

- who are overcome with greed

- and the people who worship idols.

- Jesus came to save

- people who are lost

- and people who are confused.

- Jesus came to save each and every one of us,

- sinners that we are.

- Knowing our imperfections,

- knowing our deepest, darkest secrets,

- knowing our weaknesses and disobedience,

- Amazingly enough -

- Jesus came to save us anyway.

- And if for some reason

- you are tempted to think

- that God's love can't extend to you, - -

- given all you've done in your life, - - -

- you need only look at the author of 1st Timothy

- to know that God's ability to show

- mercy, love and forgiveness is greater

- than your ability to sin.

- Remember how the author of 1st Timothy describes himself,

“I was formerly a blasphemer [one who spoke against God]

- a persecutor [one who arrested and hurt God's people]

- and a man of violence.” (1st Timothy 1:13)

- Even with all of those strikes against him,

- he isn't abandoned by God,

- but rather

- God gives him the opportunity

- and the help he needs

- to build a new life,

- serving God instead of opposing God.

- God looks at this sinful man,

- and says

- “I want you to speak for me.

- I want you to tell my story.
- I want you to help other people discover
 - what it means to be a child of God.”
- What God does for the author of Timothy - -
 - would be the rough equivalent of
 - someone at work or school
 - who gets caught lying about their accomplishments, - -
 - who has a history of bullying other people and
 - who has been accused of actually causing another harm - -
 - getting a second chance.
 - Instead of kicking that person out or getting rid of them,
 - the individual in charge
 - pulls them aside and says, - -
 - ‘I forgive you.
 - I believe in you.
 - I want to help you change your life and
 - when this transformation is mostly complete, - -
 - I want you to be the spokesperson for this organization.’
- As remarkable and unlikely as it may seem,
 - That’s what we see happening in Timothy.
 - The author has received
 - unconditional
 - love, mercy and forgiveness,

- not earned or deserved,

- but rather given as a gift.

- This love, mercy and forgiveness

- has completely reshaped and reformed his life

- to the point where he is no longer

- a blasphemer, persecutor and man of violence

- but is now a proclaimer, encourager and man of peace.

- It is a radical transformation,

- to be sure,

- and it occurs because of the gift of grace - -

- the gift of undeserved, unearned

- love, mercy and forgiveness

- that comes to each of us

- through the life, death and resurrection

- of Jesus Christ.

- Because of God's grace,

- we have the opportunity

- to experience the promise of eternal life with God.

- Because of God's grace,

- we have the promise

- of forgiveness when we do something wrong.

- Because of God's grace,

- we have the comfort of knowing

- that no matter where we go or what we do,
 - God will always be with us.
- Because of God's grace,
 - we know that even when we wander far from God,
 - God is right there calling us
 - to turn back
 - and know the joy and peace of a relationship with God.
- Just like the author of 1st Timothy,
 - we each have the opportunity
 - to root our life in God's grace, - -
 - to build our lives on this wonderful good news
 - of God's love, mercy and forgiveness
 - that is given freely to us.
- We have the opportunity to hear God say,
 - 'You are my child.
 - I loves you.
 - I forgive you.'
 - To me,
 - those are three powerful, life changing statements
 - which flow from God's grace
 - that mean we are never alone,
 - we are always cared for,
 - and we will never be abandoned.

- To me,
 - God's grace offers us a sense of security,
 - a sense of peace,
 - and a sense of belonging
 - that allows us to step boldly into the world each day
 - knowing that whatever may happen
 - God will be with us
 - and our future with God is secure.
- And while we can't escape the fact,
 - that we are all sinners,
 - we can rejoice in the good news that Jesus Christ came to save sinners
 - sinners, - - like you and me
 - and we can root our lives in this good news of grace
 - allowing God's unearned love, mercy and forgiveness
 - to reshape our view of God's relationship with us
 - and the world,
 - to guide the way we treat other people,
 - and to inspire us seek lives of peace
 - secure in the promise of God's presence with us
 - and of the promise of eternal life
 - we have
 - in Jesus Christ our Lord.