

“Even Though...Mercy and Grace”

Scripture: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Graphic: forgiveness, sin, cross, Paul

Key Verses: 1:13 - even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me...

Theme: We've all done some foolish things. We've all sinned. Paul did some sinful, foolish things. Yet, **EVEN THOUGH** he initially rejected Jesus in some violent ways, God gave him mercy and grace. We have the same opportunity every time we sin...even though we fall, there's mercy and grace.

1) Introduction

- a) Turn with me to Acts chapter 7 starting in verse 54...
- b) Read Acts 7:54-8:3
- c) Acts 9:1-9
- d) Saul, later known as the Apostle Paul...this guy was intense...
- e) He was present at, and approved, the stoning of Stephen...he continued to passionately persecute Christians...having them jailed and killed, all because they confessed publically and privately that Jesus Christ was the Jewish Messiah.
- f) Saul didn't like that...he was a Jewish religious leader whose very life centered on the fact that the Jewish Law was the main thing.
- g) Saul did sinful and foolish things in order to preserve what HE wanted...HIS lifestyle.
- h) But after he had an encounter with the living God, which blinded him for three days, requiring him to depend on others and truly LISTEN to the voice of God calling him out of his sin...Saul became a believer...he trusted in Christ as Lord and Savior...he received from Christ that which he did NOT deserve and was spared through Christ from that which he DID deserve...
- i) And one day, Paul now, nearing the end of his life...having served the church well, through extremely difficult persecution and prison...he writes to a young preacher named Timothy.
- j) And the wisdom that comes from a lifetime of service to Christ comes flowing out of Paul...an encouragement for his young friend Tim.

k) This morning, Paul reminds us that even though we are sinners, there is mercy and grace from God through Christ Jesus...

l) Pray...

2) Scripture

a) Read verses 1:12

i) Paul said, "I am grateful..." This man, who used to be mean and nasty to the Christian...who was blinded by Christ...who was beaten to an inch of his life...who was jailed, shipwrecked, and broken more times than most of us have had a hangnail, WAS GRATEFUL!

ii) Tim Hansel, a gifted Christian writer, goes to the heart of the matter this way:

Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional. We cannot avoid pain, but we can avoid joy. God has given us such immense freedom that he will allow us to be as miserable as we want to be.

I know some people who spend their entire lives practicing being unhappy, diligently pursuing joylessness. They get more mileage from having people feel sorry for them than from choosing to live out their lives in the context of joy.

Joy is simple (not to be confused with easy). At any moment in life, we have at least two options, and one of them is to choose an attitude of gratitude, a posture of grace, a commitment to joy.

--Willard Gaylin, *The Rage Within: Anger in Modern Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 33.

iii) Paul chose an attitude of gratitude! He made the choice to be strengthened by Christ for the hard service he undertook, BECAUSE God judged him faithful and gave him those tasks.

iv) An older friend of mine often reminds me when I feel overwhelmed and busy that God has given me the gift of a task...He has given me a job to do...a calling. And I should choose gratitude...

v) Paul chose gratitude in the midst of hard service. He was grateful...

vi) You see, the GRATEFUL believe that we **have** better than we **deserve**.

vii) The grateful don't take things for granted, but understand that good things are a gift.

- viii) The grateful don't act as those who are entitled, but are blessed by a God who gives us what we don't deserve and withholds **that** which we actually DO deserve.
- ix) Gratitude gives thanks to God for mercy and grace.
- x) Complaining, on the other hand, focuses on what we don't have, or what we think we want or should have, but don't. Complaining is thinking that we know, deserve - are entitled to - more than we do. Complaining is sinful and tears down the body of Christ, especially if done in the life of the church.
- xi) Gratitude notices the good and is thankful.
- xii) Gratitude sets us up for joy in life.
- xiii) Rather than simply existing or consuming, the grateful CHOOSE to embrace what life gives and enjoy life's twists and turns.
- xiv) Paul CHOSE to be grateful because of what Jesus had done in his life, not be bitter that because he chose Christ that he was beaten and persecuted. Part of the reason is because he had done some of that himself to others and was convicted that it was completely wrong!
- xv) But after God got hold of him, his response, he writes to Timothy, was...BE GRATEFUL for Jesus.
- xvi) Because...God judged me faithful and gave me the gift of a task...

b) Read verses 1:13-14

- i) EVEN THOUGH, Paul says, I did all those things and don't deserve anything but the punishment coming to me...EVEN THOUGH, I was a man of VIOLENCE - I killed the people who loved Jesus...EVEN THOUGH, I blasphemed the name of Jesus in public and private...EVEN THOUGH I persecuted ANYONE who pledged allegiance to Jesus...I received mercy and grace.
- ii) EVEN THOUGH...let those words sink in for a second...
- iii) Even though, I speak hurtful and unkind words sometimes to my spouse...

- iv) Even though, I keep the TV on that channel that degrades women a few minutes longer than I should...
- v) Even though I get caught up in gossip and complaining around the water cooler...
- vi) Even though I fail to love my family, sometimes, because... _____
whatever it is for you.
- vii) Even though... **there's mercy and grace**. Paul knew it by experience. And you can know it today, as well.
- viii) Preacher David Jeremiah said, "Mercy is God with-holding that which we truly deserve and GRACE is God giving us what we don't deserve."
(REPEAT)
- ix) He goes on to say, "Mercy is with-holding the knife from Isaac's heart, and Grace is providing a ram in the thicket."
- x) "Mercy is Jesus on the cross and Grace is him telling the thief next to Jesus that he will see him in paradise."
- xi) Paul deserved to die for his sin (The wages of sin is death – Romans 6:23)! But God withholds what we deserve, and freely gives us what we don't because of love and faith in Jesus Christ. AND, Romans 6:23 goes on to say that this free gift of God is eternal life in our Lord Jesus Christ.
- xii) Even though... Paul goes on to write...

c) Read verses 1:15-16

- i) Paul is laying out the Good News of salvation to remind Timothy of the main thing...
- ii) Jesus died to save sinners...
- iii) And Paul calls himself the CHIEF of all sinners...the foremost sinner.
- iv) I like that...why? Because if PAUL is the chief of all sinners, the FOREMOST of the bad people in the whole world that ever lived...that means that **I** am not!
- v) Look, I fully embrace the fact that I'm a sinner in need of salvation...and I fully get the fact that every day, I engage in sin either by omission

- (leaving something undone that God is calling me to do) or by commission (doing that which God has clearly, in his Word warned me not to do), but I just get really uncomfortable thinking of myself as the CHIEF of all sinners.
- vi) I haven't murdered anyone...I haven't cheated on my wife...I haven't kicked old ladies or been mean to cats (...most of the time)...
 - vii) I'm basically a good person...
 - viii) However, sometimes we act ignorantly like Paul did...sometimes we reject Jesus with our actions and our words...
 - ix) And maybe, just maybe, we're not as WORTHY and HEALTHY as we'd like to think...
 - x) In verse 16, Paul writes, "it was for THAT REASON, I received mercy"
 - xi) What reason? Because I am a sinner...did Paul receive mercy because he was a sinner? No! Did Paul receive mercy because he was a good guy? Do we receive mercy because of the good or bad things we do?
 - xii) Who's ready for some theology this morning? If we receive mercy and grace because of the bad or good things we do, then it's about **us**. And if it's about us, knowing that we sin and can't stand in the holy presence of God, then we're all toast! God is holy and we are not, on our own.
 - xiii) So what's the reason Paul received mercy? What's the reason we receive mercy?
 - xiv) Verse 15...It's Jesus! Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners...not to save good people. He came to free us from the ultimate punishment we deserve for the foolish, sinful things we do and say...
 - xv) He came to withhold those things from us that we deserve (that's MERCY) and to give us those things which we DON'T deserve (that's GRACE).
 - xvi) (excitedly) And as if Paul is overflowing with excitement about the fact that Jesus Christ came to save sinners, and Paul was the biggest sinner of all, Paul praises the holy name of Almighty God...

d) Read verse 1:17

- i) To this God that loves us and is worthy of our faith...to the One that saves sinners like Paul, and like you, and like me...to this God that figured out a way, however painful it was for Him, to withhold that which we truly deserve and to give us that which we don't deserve...GIVE ALL HONOR AND GLORY!
- ii) Can't you just feel Paul's giddiness...he's like my nephew who, when he gets excited does "The Flap"...you know the flap...(demonstrate)...
- iii) Paul has had it with talk ABOUT God and what He did in Jesus and is now just talking TO GOD – he can't help it, the praise is just flowing out of him...praising God and giving him HONOR and GLORY.
- iv) And not just once...not just during worship on Sunday morning...but FOREVER and EVER. Forever is a long time...but forever and EVER is way longer than THAT!
- v) It's as if Paul is exploding with praise because he once did foolish sinful things to reject Christ and now he is doing foolish things like getting thrown in jail, beaten, and shipwrecked FOR Christ.
- vi) And God is pleased, even though he was a sinner, to withhold punishment that he DID deserve, and give grace (eternal life in Christ) that he honestly did not...none of us do.

3) Application

- a) I've done some foolish things in my day. I've said some things, even this week that I wish I hadn't said.
- b) There have been times in my life that I have ignored God's call and walked my own path...
- c) For that, I deserve the payment for sin...which is death.
- d) And in your mind right now, if you're honest, you may be replaying those tapes that remind you of the fact that you too are a sinner.
- e) We may not be comfortable being called the chief of sinners, like Paul called himself, but if we stop and get quiet in this room alone right now...the Holy Spirit is simply reminding you that not everything is as it seems all the time.

- f) We are sinners...in need of a Savior everyday...and we don't need to stay foolish sinners any longer...
- g) Billy Graham wrote, "I am convinced one of the joys of heaven will be discovering the hidden ways that God, in his sovereignty, acted in our lives on earth to protect us and guide us so as to bring glory to his name, in spite of our frailty. As I look back over the years, however, I know that my deepest feeling is one of overwhelming gratitude.

I cannot take credit for whatever God had chosen to accomplish through us and our ministry; only God deserves the glory, and we can never thank him enough for the great things he has done.

--Billy Graham, God's Hand on My Life, Newsweek, March 29, 1999, 65.

- h) Be grateful today, that God loves each one of us so much that he sent His Son to die on the cross to save you and give you eternal life.

4) Conclusion

- a) You know, Paul did some terrible things in the name of religion and the Law...
- b) We find ourselves, sometimes, complaining about our lives, engaging in sin, or finding ways to be unhappy...
- c) If that's where you are right now, then let me pray for you this prayer, because you don't have to stay there:
- d) *Father, bind our wounds and make us whole in Christ. Pull us up from the miry pit that sometimes holds us and keeps us stuck. Forgive us for all the ways we've helped make it possible to be where we are. Free us to take your hand and allow you to give us what we don't deserve right now...a fresh start. We turn to you and look into your face, Lord...Amen!*
- e) If that prayer was for you, and you prayed that with me...then we're all on the same page now...ready to receive mercy and grace.
- f) And when we do...when we are grateful for our lives in Christ, grateful for the good things gifted to us from a generous and abundant God, then what else can we do but overflow...do the *flapping*...for Him...
- g) I invite you to stand as I pray and, if you can, I would ask you to do something you may be uncomfortable to do...I would ask you to just lift one

or both hands. This isn't some trick...as our eyes are closed and our minds are focused on Jesus, our raised hands are simply a way for us to be fools for the God who is the King of Ages, immortal, invisible, the only God. It's one way to give honor and glory forever and ever, because He deserves it.

- h) God calls us by name and gives us eternal life, **EVEN THOUGH** we don't deserve it. For that, **WE PRAISE HIS NAME**... We witness for him... we seek to love him and introduce others **TO** him...
- i) Let's pray...