

## **“Motivated”**

**1 Timothy 1:12-20**

**August 30, 2009**

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

Our passage this morning shows us that one of the differences between Christianity and other religions is that Christianity believes the motives of the heart are fundamental. Christians are called to more than a change of behavior; we are also called to a change of heart. Christianity is more than simply *what* we do; it must go to the deeper place of *why* we do what we do. When you follow Jesus, get ready for something far more radical than some behavioral tweaking.

We can see the importance of the heart in the way Paul seeks to motivate Timothy to proper behavior as a leader in the church. We saw last week that Paul and Timothy had visited the church in Ephesus and found it to be in the throes of a serious doctrinal error. Paul has pressing business elsewhere, and leaves Timothy in Ephesus to set things straight. Timothy is young and shy, and he finds this charge from Paul to be a challenging one. What Timothy really wanted to do was to leave. Paul knows this and tells him to remain in Ephesus and not leave. The shy Timothy, who often lacked confidence, is to confront these powerful leaders who were full of confidence (1:7). He is to **“wage the good warfare”** (v. 18) of defending the true faith. If you were Paul and you were trying to think of something to tell Timothy to motivate him, what would you say? Perhaps you might give him a pep talk and tell him about a time in your life when you had to do something that was distasteful, but you did it anyway and good things resulted. Or perhaps you would use some form of guilt motivation: “Timothy, every good church leader has to do things like this.” The clear implication is that if you don’t do it, you’re not a very good church leader. Others might use the carrot and stick method, telling Timothy that if he wanted to advance in the ranks of church leadership, he would have to do things like this. Another common motivation today is the Nike message: Just do it!

Paul doesn’t resort to any of those. What he does is remind Timothy of the basic truths of the gospel, summarized by a statement he says is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”** Do you think Timothy had heard this before? Of course he had. He had heard it, believed it and preached it for years. But Paul reminds him of this central gospel truth because Paul knows that it is this truth and this truth alone that motivates Jesus’ followers like nothing else.

Is your Christian life standing in need of some motivation right now? It might be helpful to think of some area of your life where you know that some behavioral change is necessary. Maybe it’s some sin of the tongue, or maybe it’s some type of laziness or a sinful and harmful habit that needs to be broken. For the next few

minutes, I want you to stop thinking about that needed behavioral change and think instead of the astounding gifts of the gospel. Paul knows that we won't have power for the obligations of Christianity until we see the overflowing benefits that come to us in the gospel. I notice three powerful motivators in our passage to which I would like to invite your attention.

## I. Full Acceptance

There are a total of five "trustworthy sayings" in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, and the first one occurs here in verse 15. I find it significant that Paul spoke to Timothy about full acceptance of the central truth of Christianity, that **"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."** This would not have been new information to Timothy, but Paul finds it necessary to remind him of this most basic of Christian truths. The reason is simple. If we lack motivation, it is because we are forgetting this truth. Paul says that it is worthy of **"full acceptance."** Apparently, it is possible to have something less than such full acceptance, a partial acceptance that leaves us unmotivated. So let's look more carefully at this statement, the full acceptance of which will change us at the heart level.

Let's begin at the end and consider the last word of this truth. **"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."** Sin is the only thing capable of bringing ultimate harm. All other harm is only temporary. You can be harmed by cancer, but it is only a temporary harm, because Jesus will give us a new body at the resurrection. You can be harmed by a bad investment or a job loss, but the financial harm caused by these things is only temporary. All riches will be ours in heaven. You can be harmed by others who hate you, by loneliness, by inadequate exercise and by a poor diet. But there is only one thing in the entire universe that can bring ultimate harm, and that is sin, because it is sin that cuts us off from God. It is to deliver us from this great enemy that Jesus has come into the world. But we know from the rest of the Scriptures that there are two kinds of sinners. There's one kind of sinner that Jesus saves and another kind that remains unsaved. Both kinds are listed in our passage. Paul is an example of a saved sinner, and, at the end of the passage, two men whose names are Hymenaeus and Alexander, are examples of sinners who are in danger of not being saved.

Paul offers his own life as an example of a saved sinner, and the striking thing about Paul is that sin was a present reality for him. Notice his testimony. **"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost"** (v. 15). The present tense is striking. Here is this mature missionary at the end of his life stating that he is the chief of sinners. He didn't say, "Jesus came to save sinners, of whom I *used to be* the foremost." It is helpful to notice the contrast between Paul's understanding at this point of his life compared to his understanding of his sin before his encounter with Jesus. Pointing to that time in his life, Paul says that he was **"a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent**

**opponent**" (v. 13). He sinned with his mouth (blasphemy), his actions (persecutor) and his thoughts (anger or insolence). But the interesting thing is that even though his sin was so great before his conversion to Jesus, his sense of his sin was nonexistent. He says in one place that he was blameless under the law (Phil. 3:6). Before his conversion he was guilty of great sin, but regarded himself as one without sin. After his conversion, even though he was a mature, godly man, he regarded himself as a great sinner.

Jesus spoke about this same thing in one of his parables. **"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'"** The primary quality of the Pharisee was making comparisons with others in order to make himself look good. The primary quality of the tax collector was an awareness of his sin. Literally, he says, **"God, be merciful to me, *the* sinner!"** Like Paul, his sin is so deep that it seems to him as if no one could be a bigger sinner.

The other type of sinner listed here is the sinner like Hymenaeus and Alexander, who have **"made shipwreck of their faith"** (v. 19). A shipwreck is a serious matter. Unlike other types of wrecks, when a ship wrecks on the rocks and sinks, it is almost never able to be recovered. Presumably, these two men once had a type of faith, since you have to have something before you can wreck it. That doesn't mean you can lose your salvation. They had a type of faith, but it wasn't a saving faith. What was it about their faith that was inadequate? We are given a clue earlier in that same verse, where Paul tells Timothy to hold to **"faith and a good conscience."** How is it that you hold to a good conscience? By coming clean with private sins that no one else would know about unless you told them. Apparently, Hymenaeus and Alexander were making shipwreck of their faith by harboring these private sins instead of confessing them. It is not the presence of sin that destroys our faith, but the lying about the presence of sin that does us in.

Consider now the first two words of this statement. **"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."** It is the Holy Spirit's work to turn our eyes from self to Jesus. It is Satan's greatest desire to get us to look at ourselves and our experiences, instead of at Jesus. I like the way Charles Spurgeon speaks of this.

[Satan] insinuates, "Your sins are too great for pardon; you have no faith; you do not repent enough; you will never be able to continue to the end; you do not have the joy of His children; you have such a wavering hold on Jesus." All these are thoughts about self, and we will never find comfort or assurance by looking within. But the Holy Spirit turns our eyes entirely away from self: He tells us that we are nothing, but that Christ is everything. Remember, therefore, it is not *your hold* on Christ that

saves you—it is Christ; it is not *your joy* in Christ that saves you—it is Christ; it is not even faith in Christ, although that is the instrument—it is Christ’s blood and merits. Therefore, do not look so much to your hand with which you are grasping Christ as to Christ (*Morning and Evening*, June 28).

Finally, Jesus came to *save*, to rescue completely. It was a sovereign grace. Paul was not looking for it, but rather doing all he could to run away from it. But Jesus sought him and found him, saving Paul from himself. Paul was left with a sense of God’s grace as overflowing, like a river overflowing its banks. When that happens, everything gets completely soaked. The glorious truth of the gospel is that no one is beyond the reach of God’s sovereign grace.

## II. Faithful Service

I note that Paul viewed his service to Jesus as a privilege more than a duty. **“I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service”** (v. 12). Jesus gave him strength and appointed him to a ministry of taking the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul was lost in wonder at this. He didn’t view the situation as one in which he was doing Jesus a favor, but that Jesus was doing him a favor. This is especially striking when we consider the difficult nature of Paul’s ministry. **“Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure”** (2 Cor. 11:24-27). Paul wrote these words before the ones of our passage. This seasoned missionary had suffered greatly in the service of Christ, but he had no regrets.

The lesson we learn here is that service of the Lord which is half-hearted is de-motivating. If we only give ourselves to God and his service after we do all the things we want to do, we will find ministry burdensome and unwanted. It’s like trying to ride a bicycle while keeping one foot on the ground at all times. It can be done, but it’s not really riding a bicycle. The kind of ministry that motivates is the kind that is fully involved and committed. Paul had that kind of ministry.

## III. God-Centered Thanksgiving

There is such a thing as man-centered thanks to God. It views God as a character in the big story about my life, and gives him some credit for doing things that I am unable to do for myself. It sees God’s chief role as helping to meet my needs, and then acknowledges his help with a word of thanks. That was

not Paul's view of thanksgiving. Paul's heart was full of thanks to the Lord, and he couldn't help but break forth in doxology in verse 17. Notice, though, how God-centered was his praise. He said that the God had saved him, the chief of sinners, in order that **"Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life"** (v. 16). Everything in his life, he saw, was devoted to the purpose of God and his glory.

Several years ago, I came across a parable from Brennan Manning in his book, *Ruthless Trust*. The parable is about a water bearer in India who carried water in two pots that were hung on both ends of a pole carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and leaked half its water out by the time he made the trip from the river to his master's house. In the parable, the cracked pot is unhappy about its inability to deliver a full pot of water and apologies to the water carrier for his deficiencies.

The water-bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion, he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they went up the hill, the cracked pot took notice of the beautiful wildflowers on the side of the path, bright in the sun's glow, and the sight cheered it up a bit.

But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad that it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, not on the other pot's side? That is because I have always known about your flaw, and I have taken advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day, as we have walked back from the stream, you have watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table.

Manning then concludes with a surprising application. We expect him to apply this to us in a moralistic way by saying that we need to accept our flaws and shortcomings. But he says this instead:

"Without you the Master would not have had this beauty to grace his house." The pot had assumed that the sole purpose of its existence was to haul water from the stream to the house. Enfolded within its narrow self-determination, the flawed pot had not suspected God's grand purpose for it; to give life to the dormant flower seeds along the path.

## **CONCLUSION:**

It is said of John Newton, the famous slave trader turned preacher, and author of the hymn "Amazing Grace", that he said the following just prior to his death. "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior!" If we would be motivated in our lives, our need is to remember those two things as well.