

Friday Pre-Communion

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Date: 10 May 2019

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[0 : 00] Timothy was a good man, but he was just a man for all that.

He was a man, like Elijah before him, of like passions as ourselves. He was weak, it would appear somewhat timid, and that seems to be the implication of what Paul says there in verse 7, where he reads, for the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline.

And it would seem he was tempted to remain silent when his calling was to speak. Paul, in the following verse, in verse 8, urges him, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord.

And it would seem unnecessary to urge him in that way if that was not something that Timothy in some measure was struggling with, a fear to speak about Jesus.

What Timothy needs to do is join with Paul in suffering for the gospel. Now, that is a tough call. It's always tough if we're called to suffer. Who wants to suffer?

[1 : 26] It's necessary and right, but it's tough. How does Paul back up his call to give testimony about our Lord and endure the suffering that will accompany such loyalty to Jesus?

So here you have Timothy. Paul is urging him to do this. How does he encourage him to do so? How does he urge him to do so? What does he do to just help him do that which he has been called to do?

Does Paul put his arm around Timothy and whisper in his ear, come on, Timothy, be brave. You can do it. Does he give him a high-octane pep talk?

Maybe something like what Jurgen Klopp must have given to his Liverpool players on Tuesday night. If you don't understand the football reference, I'm sorry, but it was a historic night when Liverpool were able to turn around a seemingly hopeless situation.

Much has been said of the manager Klopp and his power to enthuse and to motivate and to get these players to go above and beyond and secure this famous victory.

[2 : 34] Well, is that what Paul does? Is he this high-octane motivational speaker who manages to get Timothy to do that which seemed impossible? Is that what he does?

Does he send Timothy on a course on how to evangelize confidently and effectively? He's thinking, well, this Timothy, you know, he's promising and he knows the truth and he's, you know, he's zealous, but he just seems to be a little bit slow in one or two things.

Well, we'll send him on a course. That should sort it out. Does he do that? Or does he urge Timothy and maybe his fellow leaders to work on a mission strategy that will allow them to maybe do that which they haven't been doing?

Now, let me be clear. I'm not belittling any of these possible approaches. No doubt there is a place for them all. But what does Paul do here?

What Paul does is he gives Timothy the gospel. Let's just read verses 9 and 10. Here he is. He's urging him to not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, to join with Paul in suffering for the gospel.

[3 : 42] And then what does he do? He gives him the gospel. Verses 9 and 10. He has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace.

This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

These two verses are almost like this small pocket-sized creed of what the gospel is. And so what Paul does on behalf of Timothy, to urge Timothy to testify to the Savior, to join with Paul in suffering for the gospel, what does he do?

He gives him the gospel. But Timothy needs to hear and believe and own and be emboldened by is the gospel and the God of the gospel.

This evening I want us to focus on what Paul says about this grace. Notice in verse 9, in the second half of the verse, the second sentence begins, this grace was given us in Christ Jesus.

[4 : 54] And obviously it refers back to a mention of that same grace in the first part of the verse. And what I want to say this evening revolves around that, this grace.

But before we can focus in on this grace, we need to quickly comment on the first half of verse 9, where we have the reference to grace that is picked up on in that second sentence that begins, this grace.

What do we read in the first half of verse 9? Let's just go through it quickly and see what it says. He has saved us. Paul very clearly declares what we know to be true, that it is God who saves sinners. And it is God who has saved us. Our salvation is not some future aspiration, but a present reality. He has saved us.

We are sinners, but we are saved sinners. God has saved us. And then Paul continues, and called us to a holy life. We are saved by God for God, to live a God-pleasing, holy life.

[6 : 03] And Paul continues, noting and reminding Timothy that this salvation is not because of anything that we have done, but because of His, that is, God's own purpose and grace.

This salvation is grounded in God, and very particularly grounded in His purpose and grace. I think the best way of understanding these two elements, purpose and grace, is to bring them together in an expression along the lines of His gracious purpose.

He has saved us because of His purpose and grace, or because of His gracious purpose. We have been saved because of God's purpose to save, and that purpose to save is a gracious purpose. It is grounded in and reflective of God's glorious grace. Now, having just noted that first half of verse 9, now let's explore this grace in the light of what Paul says in the second half of the verse and in verse 10.

And what Paul does in this second half of verse 9 and into verse 10 is that he outlines what we might call, or what I'm calling, a brief history of grace.

[7 : 24] So let's think of it with that as the title, a brief history of grace. I don't know, obviously I've stolen that title from a book that some of you may be familiar with, A Brief History of Time by Stephen Hawking.

I'm told it's the most owned and least read book in the history of time. I don't know if that's true. I read that somewhere, but I can't vouch for the accuracy of that statement.

I would certainly contribute to that statistic. I own the book, but I never quite made it to the end. I began it, but never finished it, and that seems to be true of many. In contrast, Paul's brief history of grace is a short but thrilling read.

And let me illustrate or explain why I'm calling this passage, or the second half of verse 9 and verse 10, a brief history of grace by identifying three time-related aspects of this exploration of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

This grace, notice there that sentence in the second half of verse 9, this grace, and then Paul continues. This grace is, first of all, given in eternity.

[8 : 38] It's the first thing we're going to notice. It's given in eternity. But secondly, we're going to notice that it is revealed in history. And thirdly, it is dispensed or experienced in the here and now.

So, you can see a flow to that. And the reason why we can maybe speak of what Paul says here about grace as a brief history of grace.

Given in eternity, revealed in history, and dispensed or experienced in the here and now. So, that's what we want to think about, these three elements or three aspects of grace.

These three chapters, if you wish, in the book, a brief history of grace. First of all then, given in eternity. And we'll read again what is said there in the second half of verse 9.

This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. What is Paul saying about this grace, this saving grace to which he has just attributed our salvation?

[9 : 45] Well, he says three things in this statement. He tells us that it is given us. He tells us that it is given us in Christ Jesus. And he identifies the when, if you wish, before the beginning of time.

And let's just start with the last element. Before the beginning of time. In eternity past. Before the creation of the universe. God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit determined to save a people for himself.

Before he had even created that people that he was determining to save. Now, that, this determination on the part of God, remounts to eternity past.

It only serves to confirm what Paul has just said about salvation being not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace.

If God had determined to save us, indeed gave us this grace before the beginning of time, then we can so evidently conclude that it's nothing to do with what we can or have or will or might contribute to it.

[10 : 53] Nothing to do with us. It's all to do with God given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

This grace, Paul explains, was given us. It's a gift and it's a gift pledged by God to us. In God's mind and purpose, it is already given, but the handing over of the gift awaits the dawn of time.

And the grace is given us in Christ Jesus. This grace is brought to us in Christ's person and future work.

The same language of a gift being given to us in or through Christ Jesus is language that Paul uses in his letter to the Romans in Romans chapter 5 and verse 15.

Let's just quickly read verse 15 and 17 of Romans chapter 5 and see an echo of this same language, of the gift being given in Christ Jesus.

[12 : 01] Romans 5 verse 15. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many?

This gift of grace, this grace of God given to us in or through this one man, Jesus Christ. And the same theme and language we find in verse 17.

Just jumping to verse 17. For if by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. The reformer John Calvin in his commentary on 2 Timothy and on this expression affirms that this giving of grace is nothing else than predestination by which we are adopted to be sons of God.

I'm not sure if we need to so precisely identify this giving of grace with predestination or election, but the reality of God's election of his own is certainly in total and beautiful harmony with Paul's language and affirmation here.

[13 : 30] This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. Now, this is mind-blowing truth.

It's difficult for our minds to grasp the reality of this and the implications of this. And the only proper response to that which we can only in a measure understand and grasp is one of humble gratitude and praise.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift, this grace that was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

So, given in eternity, but secondly, revealed in history. So, as we continue through this brief history of grace, we want to think about this second chapter in the book, revealed in history.

What does Paul say there in verse 10? We'll read from the second half of verse 9 to get the flow of the sentence.

[14 : 39] This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus.

It has now been revealed. This grace that was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time has now been revealed. The now there serves as a clear and almost dramatic contrast with the before the beginning of time.

This is what happened before the beginning of time, but now we've moved on in our brief history of grace. What God purposed in eternity is revealed in history. But how is this grace revealed?

Well, we're told it's revealed through the appearing, through the epiphany of our Savior, Christ Jesus. God's grace is revealed in history in the person and work of His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

What are we to understand by this appearing or His appearing? Well, this takes us back to Bethlehem and the first Christmas when grace appeared in a manger.

[15:52] The grace of God appeared in the one named Emmanuel, God with us. What does John say in the opening of his gospel about the coming of Jesus and what the coming of Jesus allowed us to see and to witness?

Let's just read what John says there in John 1 and verse 14. A very familiar verse, but that has to do with or illustrates what is being said here by Paul in his letter to Timothy.

In John 1 verse 14, The Word became flesh. This is the appearing of grace. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory.

So this grace that was present before the beginning of time appears, becomes visible. We have seen His glory. The glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father full of grace and truth. And so grace becomes visible through the appearing, through the coming of Jesus, the eternal Son of God. Jesus revealed God's grace throughout His life in His character and conduct, in His love and compassion, in His miracles and in His teaching.

[17:18] And supremely, He revealed God's grace in His atoning death, in the place of sinners, and in His glorious resurrection. In all of these ways, Jesus, who appeared, revealed this grace that Paul is speaking about.

And notice that this revealed grace is effective grace. This grace is not just to be admired as a marvelous and a beautiful thing. We're not simply to look on and say, Well, what a beautiful thing, the grace of God.

What a beautiful thing to see the grace of God in the person of Jesus, in His character, and in His love, and His compassion. And we look at it, we read the Gospels, and we say, What a marvelous thing. What a beautiful thing. What a heartwarming thing to see, to witness the grace of God in Jesus.

Of course, we can do all of that. But it's not just that. This grace is effective. This is grace that actually secures our salvation, which is precisely what Paul goes on to say in the same verse.

This grace has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

[18:32] This grace is effective in securing our salvation. This salvation is presented by Paul here in two of its related and symmetrical aspects, destroying death and bringing life.

And let's just comment on those two aspects of our salvation, secured by Jesus and by the grace of God revealed in Jesus.

It is death-destroying grace. That's the first thing that Paul says of the effectiveness of this grace. It is death-destroying. And what death does grace destroy?

Well, grace destroys principally and most significantly spiritual death. At the fall, humanity died spiritually. Remember what Adam and Eve were told.

The moment that you eat of the tree, you will surely die. Sin and rebellion brought death into the human experience, spiritual death. Adam and Eve didn't physically die in that moment, but they died spiritually.

[19:39] Grace in Jesus destroys that death. It breaks the vice-like grip of death over sinners, over you and me. At the cross, sin is dealt with and its wages are paid by Jesus.

But grace will also, in time, destroy physical death. In the new heavens and new earth, death will be no more. In the spiritual that we sometimes sing, no more dying there.

We are going to see the king. No more crying there. We are going to see the king. No more dying there. Because this grace of God is death-destroying grace.

But then the other side of the coin, and the beautiful symmetry in these two aspects of our salvation, it is also life-giving grace. Not only death-destroying grace, but life-giving grace.

This grace has appeared, or has now been revealed, through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

[20:50] Life and immortality. There are two words there, and two elements, that are very much related and overlapping, but I think distinct. I think when Paul here speaks of how, in Jesus, life has been brought, that's in contrast to spiritual death.

Grace conceives spiritual life. This is the life that springs from the new birth. This is the product of regeneration. The spiritually dead are raised to life.

Paul dwells on that and very vividly speaks about that in his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, in Ephesus chapter, or in Ephesians, rather, chapter 2, and in verse 4 we read, but because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ.

Even when we were dead in transgressions, it is by grace that you have been saved. Made alive in Christ. Given new life. But not only life, but also immortality.

And I think here the word immortality is pointing to the nature of this life that we are raised to. And maybe that's just trying to be a little bit too neat, but I think we can draw that distinction.

[22 : 08] Life, that new spiritual life given to us by God. But what kind of life? Well, it is a life that is marked by immortality. It is eternal life.

It is life to the full. It is life in communion and friendship with God and in community with God's people. It is life in the here and now and it is life that extends in ever greater richness into eternity. It is life-giving grace. This grace that has appeared in Christ Jesus is effective for our salvation, destroying death and bringing life.

Let's notice the third chapter, if you wish, in this brief history of grace. And the way I'm entitling this, and this one we need to just think about a little bit more.

It's not so immediately evident. But the title I've given to this third chapter is dispensed or experienced in the here and now. This grace that is spoken of at the beginning of the second sentence in verse 9.

[23 : 15] This grace, the grace upon which our salvation is grounded. This grace, given in eternity, revealed in history, but now dispensed or experienced in the here and now.

And I want us to just reflect a little bit on the use of the final expression in verse 10 that Paul employs when he speaks about how Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

And we just want to pause for a moment and think about what Paul means when he uses this expression through the gospel. I think Paul is using these words in two ways or with two complementary senses.

And here I don't think we need to choose between one or the other. You know, sometimes we're looking at a passage and we say, well, this might mean this or it might mean that and it probably can't mean both and we need to somehow, sometimes just choose the one that we think is most likely.

I think on this occasion, there are two senses in which this expression through the gospel can be understood. And I think it's legitimate to take the view that Paul is considering both of them.

[24 : 25] First of all, the word gospel is being used as a shorthand expression for the mission of Jesus, his perfect life, his atoning death, his triumphant resurrection.

We could go on. It is through these saving events that Jesus has brought life and immortality. So how is life and immortality being brought to sinners? Well, through the gospel, through the events of the gospel story, through what Jesus has done, through these things, through the gospel, life and immortality has been brought to light.

Understanding it in that way really is part of the second chapter, revealed in Christ Jesus. But I think Paul is using the expression through the gospel in a second and related sense.

Life and immortality are brought through the gospel in the sense that it is through the proclamation of the gospel that sinners are brought to know and experience the grace of God.

As the gospel is preached, as it is proclaimed, as it is shared in the here and now, not in eternity past, not 2,000 years ago when Jesus appeared and revealed the grace of God, but now, in the here and now, as the gospel is proclaimed, as this grace is offered and dispensed, and as men and women believe this grace is experienced in the here and now by you and me.

[26 : 07] Listen to Paul as he opens his letter to Titus. It's just the next book in the Bible where he uses the expression in a very similar way. You may see some parallels to what I'm saying about the passage we're looking at and what we read there at the beginning of Titus.

So Titus chapter 1 and verses 1 to 3. Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness, in the hope of eternal life which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and which now, at his appointed season, he has brought to light.

Notice the same language as we have there in Timothy. He is brought to life through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior.

So he's speaking about salvation, grace, new life, being brought to life through the preaching. And I think here in 2 Timothy, in chapter 1, when Paul uses this expression, through the gospel, yes, he's speaking about how life and immortality have been brought to life, brought to light, through the

events of the gospel, through the work of Jesus, through his death, through his resurrection. But I think he also has in mind the sense in which the grace of God is brought to light through the preaching of the gospel.

[27 : 33] The content of the gospel, the facts of the gospel, bring life. But the preaching of those facts, the preaching of that content, is used of God to bring life in our actual here and now experience.

So there you have it. A brief history of grace given in eternity, revealed in history, dispensed and experienced in the here and now.

But as we kind of draw this to a close, let's just go back to Timothy for a moment. In Paul's stress on grace being brought to light through the gospel, particularly the second sense in which we've suggested we can understand that expression, Paul is gently prodding and encouraging Timothy to continue preaching and sharing the good news.

Speaking about the testimony about our Lord. And as Paul gently prods and encourages Timothy, so he also gently prods and encourages us.

That grace, which was given in eternity, revealed in history, must be offered winsomely and passionately today, in the here and now, by you and me.

[28 : 56] May God help us so to do. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your glorious grace. We thank you for this grace given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

We thank you for the manner in which this grace appeared, was revealed in the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus. We thank you for the effectiveness of this grace in destroying death and bringing new life to the dead.

We thank you for the opportunity we have to experience that grace in our own lives, but also to share this good news and through the gospel see how this grace is experienced by others as the Holy Spirit owns our very inadequate proclamation of it to the saving of sinners.

We pray that that would be our desire, that would be our ever-present concern to share with others this good news and we pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.