

CHRISTMAS AND THE GOSPEL MESSAGE (1 Timothy 1:15)

When I select a passage from which to preach, I normally choose a paragraph or two if it is from the NT; if it is from a narrative portion of the OT, I might preach through one or two chapters. Regardless, I attempt to follow the flow of the passage and seek to seize the big idea of the text. Finally, I develop my outline based on what the passage says about the big idea.

Today's message will be different. I am going to preach from just one verse. In my estimation, this verse succinctly states and summarizes the big idea of many passages of the NT. Charles Spurgeon preached from this text a number of times, and he entitled one of those sermons, "The Whole Gospel in a Single Verse."

Recently, I took a man from here in Enid to the bus station in OKC. I had the privilege of watching him pack his bag, not a suit case mind you, but more like a carry-on bag. He had just done his laundry. He took this mound of clothes. He carefully folded them and rolled them, and somehow, he packed all of those clothes into his small bag. I didn't think it could be done, but he proved me wrong.

In much the same way, Paul packs the enormous truth of the gospel into a single verse. He does so in 1 Timothy 1:15. This morning we will be examining this verse under the title, "Christmas and the Gospel Message." To understand the gospel, you have to catch what Christmas was all about.

The letter of 1 Timothy was written by Paul to his young protégé. He referred to Timothy as his "child in the faith." Paul had led Timothy to faith in Jesus Christ, had helped to disciple him, and now they worked together in the cause of the gospel. Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to fight against false teachers and to further the work and growth of the church in that great, metropolitan city of Asia Minor.

Immediately preceding v. 15, Paul is reflecting on how God had called him and was using him despite the fact that before coming to faith in Jesus, he had opposed the church and had persecuted Christians. Still yet, God was gracious to him and loved him. Now, we come to v. 15, and I am going to read it from the NLT.

In preparing for this message, I read our verse from a variety of translations. Earlier this week, after reading our text from the NLT, I stood up and said, "Praise the Lord."

This is a true saying, and everyone should believe it: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I was the worst of them all.

This verse reminds us of Christmas: Christ came into the world. It tells us the good news: He came to save sinners. Now, based on this one verse, I want to make five statements about the gospel message.

1. Because of God's Truthfulness, the Gospel Message Is Reliable.

Paul says, "This is a true saying." In other words, "You can take this to the bank. You can count on this. You can stand on it. This will hold your weight. It is rock solid."

How can we know that what Paul is saying is true is actually true? Experience tells us that we can't always believe people who say, "Believe me. I'm telling you the truth."

It all comes down to whether or not this book is the Word of God. Let's start with the question "Can you trust God?" Has God ever misled you? Has He ever told you something that turned out to be false, a fabrication, a distortion of the truth? Does God traffic in fake news? If the Bible is, in fact, God's Word, you can trust it because you can trust Him.

Paul wrote in Titus 1:2 that God "never lies." Have you ever met a person who has never ever told a lie? I haven't.

The prophet Balaam was hired by King Balak to curse God's people. Balaam was willing to do it, but God wouldn't let him. In the end, Balaam chose to speak only what God told him to say. Eventually, the prophet told the king, "God is not a man, that he should lie."

God speaks truth. That is why we can trust this book. In John 17, Jesus prayed to His Father. In that prayer, Jesus said, "Your word is truth" (17:17).

There is a little, four-letter Greek word that has entered into our English language. This word is used 126 times in the NT. Sometimes, the translators simply transliterated the word. That means they made the Greek letters of the word into English letters. Other times, the translators actually translated the meaning of the word into English.

The Greek word I'm speaking of is **ἀμήν**. Of course, that is where we get our word *amen*. In the NT, when it comes at the end of a prayer or a benediction, it is usually transliterated as amen, but at other times, and especially when Jesus was speaking, it is translated. The King James Version uses the word "verily." Many modern translations use the word "truly." It means, "this is so." At the end of a prayer, it means, "Let it be so."

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we find numerous occasions when Jesus would say, "Truly, I say to you," and then He would deliver a truth bomb. In John's gospel, John doubles it. He records Jesus as saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you."

Preachers, teachers, and public speaking types often do a version of this. They will pepper their delivery with phrases such as: *listen up, watch this, catch this, don't miss this*. In each instance, they are saying, "This is truth, and I don't want you to miss it."

The gospel message is, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." That is truth you do not want to miss.

2. Because of God's Love and Grace, the Gospel Message is Universal.

After telling us that this gospel message is a true saying, Paul adds, "and everyone should believe it." The version from which I usually read and preach says that the gospel message is "deserving of full acceptance."

The gospel message isn't just for North Americans or Westerners. It is not the white man's gospel only. This gospel is for everybody. It is for young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. It is for the up and in and the down and out. It is for the religious and the irreligious.

This brings up a moral question. Is it wrong for a believer in Christ to evangelize a Jew, a Muslim, a Hindu, a Buddhist, an atheist, or anyone who follows a different path,

or anyone who denies there is a path to God, or someone who believes that all paths lead to God?

Listen to what Pastor Bryan Chapel said about that:

Proclaiming the message of eternal salvation in Christ alone unquestionably evidences undiluted arrogance, gross insensitivity, and religious bigotry—unless the message is true. Then, proclamation of the only true hope is the most important and loving message that a person can communicate, and failure to do so evidences incomparable callousness, gross negligence, and religious selfishness.

That means, if the gospel message is true and we are not telling others the good news of Jesus, we are being callous, negligent, and selfish. Let me ask, “Is there anyone here who is willing to admit that you have been callous, negligent, and selfish?” God forgive us. And God embolden us.

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul gives us two motives for sharing the good news of Jesus with others. In v. 11 of the chapter, Paul wrote: “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.” The first inducement is fear. It is not that we fear God will get us if we don’t. No, we fear for others who leave this life without entering into a saving relationship with Jesus. Then, in v. 14, Paul wrote: “For the love of Christ controls us . . .” It is not our love for Christ that controls us. Rather, it is Christ’s love for us and others that impels us to share the good news with those who have not heard or who have not yet responded by giving their lives to Christ.

When I say the gospel message is universal, I am saying that the news, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” is meant for all to hear, and it should be accepted by all, but I am not saying that Jesus’ death automatically saves all sinners. It does not.

There is a false teaching called universalism. It claims all people will eventually be saved. I would like to believe that, but the Bible does not teach that. The Bible teaches that only those who believe will not perish, and those who do not place their trust in Jesus stand condemned and await judgment.

If all were going to be saved, there would be no fear of the Lord that would cause us to persuade others.

God’s word tells us, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Paul then, asks four questions in a row, one after another:

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

Brothers and sisters, you may not realize it, but we have been sent. We were given the Great Commission by our Lord to go into all the world and make disciples. The gospel message deserves to be heard by all.

3. Because of God’s Activity, the Gospel Message Is Historical.

“Christ Jesus came into the world.” That is neither a philosophical statement nor even a purely religious one. It is a fact of history. There is clear historical evidence that a

Jewish boy named Jesus was born in Bethlehem, that this boy grew up and became a traveling preacher and teacher. This man was believed by many to be the Messiah. He was ordered by Pontius Pilate to be crucified. There is historical evidence that he arose from the dead. There is historical evidence for all of those things.

Now, who you believe him to be and the meaning of his death and whether he actually did arise are all matters of faith. But make no mistake, the Christian faith is built on the foundation of historical events. There really was a man named Jesus who claimed to be the Christ. He really did die on a cross. Through the centuries since then, millions upon millions have believed that He really is the Son of God and that He really arose from the dead.

Let me contrast the Christian faith with the Mormon faith. Both make historical claims. The Mormon faith is based on *The Book of Mormon*. Joseph Smith claimed that an angel directed him to golden plates that were dug up near his home in New York in the 1820's. Smith reportedly translated what he found in 85 days (between April 7th and June 30th of 1829).

One internet source explained:

The Book of Mormon purports to give an account of two civilizations formed by families who migrated to the Americas. One group of families came from Jerusalem in 600 BC and afterward separated into two nations, known as the Nephites and the Lamanites. Another group came much earlier, when God confounded the tongues at the Tower of Babel; that group is known as the Jaredites. After thousands of years, all were destroyed except the Lamanites. Latter Day Saints believe that Lamanites are among the ancestors of the Native Americans.

Archaeology has confirmed nothing that Mormonism claims, nothing.

In contrast to that, the Bible specifies numerous locations, the names of government officials, significant events. Confirmation of those claims have come from historical research and archaeological discoveries, time and time again. The gospel message and the Christian faith are rooted in history.

4. Because of Jesus' Atonement, the Gospel Message Is Exceptional.

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." What other religion teaches that its God became man to save man?! Let's go through this statement word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase to see how amazing it is.

"Christ Jesus," are the first words of the gospel message. The word *Christ* is the Greek word for the Jewish word *Messiah*. It means, "the anointed one." Kings were anointed when they became King. King Jesus is the anointed One. He is the Promised King.

Most people didn't recognize Jesus as the Promised King because He didn't do the kinds of things everyone expected the Messiah to do. He didn't fight military battles. He didn't overthrow foreign powers. He didn't assume a Kingly reign over an earthly Kingdom.

That is not why He came the first time, but He did come. He “came into the world.” God did not save from the safety of heaven. He came into this sinful world.

God created the entire universe by simply speaking the word. He said, “Let there be,” and it was so. Why didn’t God just say, “Let them be saved”? Wouldn’t it have been much simpler if God had said, “You’re forgiven”?

In order for God to save us, He had to come to us. More than that, He had to become one of us. A human sinner needs a human Savior, but sinners must also have a sinless Savior. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, was the only One qualified to make atonement for sin. He came to pay the penalty of our sin. He took our place, and He took our punishment. In order to do that, He had to come into our world as one of us.

Consider why He didn’t come. He didn’t come to reform sinners. He didn’t come to judge sinners. He didn’t come to educate sinners. He came to do for them what they couldn’t do for themselves. He came to save them. That means He came to rescue them.

From what does Jesus rescue sinners? Several answers could be given. He rescues us from sin’s dominion. Without Jesus in our life, sin becomes our master, and sin is a cruel master. Ask anyone who has tried and worked to overcome an addiction how cruel a master sin can be.

Jesus rescues us from a wasted life. We were made to serve Jesus, and when we serve a substitute master, we cannot become all that we were meant to be. Just as Jesus brought physical wholeness to those He healed, enabling their bodies to function as they were created to function, when Jesus rescues us from sin, He enables our souls, our lives, to become what they were created to become, and that is like Jesus. To become like Jesus, we have to be rescued from sin.

Jesus came into the world to save “sinners.” If you are not a sinner, Jesus did not come to save you. Those who are good and respectable in their own eyes, Jesus can’t do anything for them. He has nothing to offer them.

Jesus did not come to encourage the righteous. He did not come to help good people complete their own self-salvation.

Consider again the words of Charles Spurgeon:

Christ Jesus came into the world to save respectable sinners and disreputable sinners. He came into the world to save proud sinners and despairing sinners. He came into the world to save drunkards, thieves, liars, whoremongers, adulterers, murderers, and such like. Whatever sort of sin there is, this word is wonderfully comprehensive and sweeping—“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” A black lot, a horrible crew, they are, and hell is their due reward, but these are the people Jesus came to save.

If you want to be helped and saved by Christ, you have to be a sinner to qualify, and I want you to know, everybody here qualifies. (Look at hymn #175).

Paul believed he was the most qualified. That bring us to the last statement

5. Because of the Spirit’s Work, the Gospel Message is Personal.

Paul makes an autobiographical statement in v. 15. He claimed, “and I was the worst

of them all.” Is Paul engaging in false humility? Is he putting on act to make people feel better about themselves? Not at all.

I believe the closer a person is to Christ, the more keenly he or she feels and sees their own sinfulness.

Years ago, I had a friend who painted the clothes line pole in his backyard. He painted it an off-white. He was proud of how it looked. Not long afterward, winter came, and with the winter, snow came. That pure white snow nestled up against that off-white clothes line, and the clothes line looked awful. It looked dirty against the whiteness of the snow.

Sinner, draw close to Christ. Allow the Spirit of God to draw you close. The closer you get to the brilliance of His moral perfection, the more awful your sin will appear to be.

Many Christians compare themselves to others. “Well, I may have my problems, but I’m not as bad as so-and-so.” Be done with comparing yourself to other people. God didn’t call you to be like Tom, Dick, or Harry. He didn’t call you to be like Mary, or Sally, or Jane. He called you to be like Jesus.

The closer your relationship with Him is, the better you are able to see how far you have to go. But don’t despair. If Jesus was able to save the worst of sinners, He will be able to save you, too.

Keep in mind, when God saves you, He doesn’t save you all at once. He justifies you immediately, but justification is just one part of your salvation. We read in Philippians 1:6, “And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus comes back again.”

When you place your faith in Jesus, that is just a tiny part of your salvation, an important part, but just a part. Jesus has begun a work in you, and unlike us, Jesus always finishes what He starts, but it takes time. Masterpieces always do.

The gospel message is:

- Reliable—You can trust it.
- Universal—It is meant for everybody.
- Historical—These things really happened.
- Exceptional—It is unlike any other religious message.
- Personal—This message is meant for you and calls for a response.