

Who Did Jesus Come For?

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. Please take a seat and open up your Bibles once more to 1 Timothy chapter 1, where we will be spending our time this evening and tomorrow as well.

Now, I wonder if you can think of someone in your life who you've admired greatly, a schoolteacher perhaps, or maybe a friend, and you look up to that person, and that person is kind of a hero to you. They're in the League of the Untouchables. They're an overused word perhaps today, but they're legends. They're just people that you just greatly admire, and you just think, I could never be, I could never be what they are.

And we feel kind of imposter syndrome almost being in their company and in their presence. And we do the same thing in the church. There's people that we greatly admire for good reason. Perhaps they serve with excellence. Maybe they are a committed and faithful prayer warrior. But we look to them and we think, well, if that's Christianity, how can I be a Christian?

[1 : 1 6] I so often fail to measure up to where this person is. And that's my picture of what true Christian living looks like. And I can't measure up. What do I do with that?

And if we look at people like that in our day and age, we do that certainly with people like the Apostle Paul. God used the Apostle Paul in many ways to plant churches as an evangelist, as a builder up of the church.

And so we look at people like the Apostle Paul and we think, that's just it. And I'm just not that. And we feel so inferior.

And while it's good to honour one another in different ways, there's a difference between honour and flattery. And I think if the Apostle Paul knew that we were looking at him and going, well, if that's Christianity, how can I be a Christian?

He would be raging. He would be so disappointed. Because there is so much in our passage here today that shows us that though God did use Paul greatly, he was just a mere human being like any one of us with his own sins and his own struggles.

[2 : 4 1] He opens his letter here as he does with many of his letters. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He wants us to know grace and mercy from God and thus peace with God.

And rather than Paul being this untouchable figure who we think, well, if that's Christianity, I'm not that. But we see and get a peek behind the curtain here as it were and see that Paul has his own sins and failings.

Has his own struggles, has his own weaknesses that deeply trouble him. So looking at verses 12 to 17 over the next three services, we're going to be first asking tonight, who did Jesus come for?

And then tomorrow morning, we will see in our first service, what did Jesus come to do? And then in our evening service, we'll ask the same question, but go for a different angle.

So tonight, we're focusing on who did Jesus come for? Now, we might have our own preconceived notions of who Jesus maybe did or didn't come for. So let's dive in and unpack that.

[3 : 5 5] First heading, did Jesus come for the righteous? Did Jesus come for the righteous? Now, if you're thinking about societally, how Christianity is viewed, it's often viewed as just tick box exercise.

Tick box religion. Keeping your noses clean and keeping God off your back. So you've maybe had the experience someone discovers at the workplace maybe, or among friends or family, discovers you're a Christian.

And they go, oh, you're a Christian. So that means you can't do X, Y, or Z. Does that mean you have to do this? Or otherwise, people might look down their nose at you.

Oh, so you're holier than thou, are you? Or if you do something which isn't becoming of a Christian, they might sting you with the words, well, that isn't very Christian of you.

And so Christianity is reduced simply to just keeping your nose clean and keeping God on side. And it seems to be built into the human psyche to view God that way.

[4 : 56] Every other world religion, major world religion, is built like that. And I guess even how life works, it's kind of built like that. So at your place of work, if you're underperforming, you get a performance review, you get hauled in in front of the manager, and you put a process in place by which to improve and to change and to improve.

We just took the car through its MOT. Things were broken that needed fixing in order to get it to pass its MOT. So you pay the money, you get it fixed, and that's just how it works.

In every other sphere of life, if something isn't working, well, you fix it. You do something in order to change that situation, to improve it. So why not the same with Jesus Christ?

Well, let's look together at 1 Timothy 1, beginning in verse 12. I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service. In that kind of language even there, you might read that on first reading and think, well, the apostle Paul is clearly a good enough standard that God has decided to use him.

[6 : 18] It's all about faithfulness. The faithful are those Jesus has his eyes on, but the sinners, not a chance. The regular Joes, not a chance. But the really good people, the hyper-religious folk, absolutely.

And the apostle Paul elsewhere, he writes in Philippians 3 with words which might make you think that it's all about that. He's talking about his life before becoming a follower of Jesus. He says, if anyone has reasons for confidence in the flesh, I have even more.

However, circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

So what Paul is saying here is, I'm the real McCoy. I'm the real deal here. I keep the law. I have every box ticked.

So Paul was a religious man. Many would think a good man. He, at even one point in his life, was convinced of that himself. But as you read on in our passage, as you read on in Philippians 3, you realize that actually Paul doesn't think that at all.

[7 : 27] Paul goes on to say in our passage, verse 13, Though formerly I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolent opponent. Down to verse 15.

The saying is trustworthy and true and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And he doesn't put a full stop there as if to kind of distance himself from that. He says, of whom I am the foremost. I am the foremost. So why then is Paul speaking of being judged faithful on the one hand, but then on the other he's kind of talking about his life pre-conversion being marked by sin, and his life post-conversion being marked as being the chief of sinners.

Is he having split personalities here? What's going on? Well, I think Paul is saying is not that Jesus has judged him worthy on his own merit.

Paul is stepping back and going, What? I'm nowhere near qualified in and of myself. Jesus, thank you for calling me. Thank you for appointing me to your service and even declaring me faithful.

[8 : 36] There's no illustration. I mean, you talk about imposter syndrome. It would be like you buying a cattle class plane ticket, right? And you're just in a row with four other people and you get called through to first class.

You didn't pay anything for it. You didn't earn it. You didn't deserve it. And all of a sudden you go from that to sitting in a nice reclined leather chair, nice meal, very comfortable.

And you're thinking, what did I do to deserve this? I've not done anything here to get here. I've not paid any money. And I think that's a bit of what Paul is doing here.

Thanking Jesus in verse 12. He's looking at his past life, his sins of his past life, and even his life now. And he is thanking Jesus for calling him to this role.

And it's even more highlighted that it's not Paul's own goodness by the fact that this section here that we're focusing on is sandwiched in praise. Verse 12, I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord.

[9 : 41] And then verse 17, to the king of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, the honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. So if Paul is strutting about as if he somehow earned this title, as he somehow earned his role, earned his salvation, then the thanksgiving is just empty words.

Because if it's all him, why is he thanking God for? And in that sheer wonder, in that is the sheer wonder of the gospel, that you have a sinner who is judged faithful.

You have a blasphemer and a persecutor being accepted through faith in Jesus. Paul would continue in Philippians 3, if there was a guy to be accepted by his own works, I'd be a shoo-in. I'd be the guy, yet I consider it loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. Is Jesus coming for the righteous?

Emphatically, not. He came for Paul, who was astounded by the grace of God at calling him, saving him.

[10 : 58] Because by God's grace, Paul knew what was up. It finally clicked with him. That in fact, he wasn't righteous. He was a sinner. He knew his past failings.

He knew even his present failings. And Paul here is just overwhelmed at the grace and mercy of God. Paul was called by God, not as a righteous man, but as a sinner.

So he was called as a sinner. But what about Paul as he is now? Verse 15. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost.

Paul never graduated from grace. He never went beyond the need for mercy in his life. Paul doesn't look at his life and reflect on the past and go, yeah, things were pretty bad.

And then I was saved and look at me now. No, I am the foremost sinner. He recognizes that his sin, far from being a problem of the past, is a present reality that he still faces and fights against.

[12 : 16] And that is the reality of the Christian life very often. And very often it's not that we're crushed all the time, that we're just excellent Christians, that we're spiritual highs all the time.

That we run out of the need for grace. No, we're always in desperate need for God to be merciful.

That we sung Psalm 130. And that is a prayer, a cry for God to be mercy.

Because the psalmist realizes, Paul realizes, and we who are believers realize, without God's mercy, we're done for.

Lord, in your presence, who can stand if you are sins record, but yet forgiveness is with you, that we may fear you, Lord.

We realize our dependency and our need constantly as believers. Now, I'm at the beginning of my parenting journey.

[13 : 20] But the goal is that the kids become less and less dependent over time as they grow. They become more independent. For example, my parents don't spoon feed me still, thankfully.

You'll be pleased to know. But that route to independence that we normally have with kids, it's actually flipped in the Christian life.

We start off thinking we're very self-sufficient and dependent on no one. And actually, the more we go on and the more we grow, the more we realize how dependent we are upon God for his mercy. Paul doesn't become less dependent on God. He's not cruising in spiritual highs all the time. Daily, he knows his dependence upon God because he knows he was a sinner.

He knows he is still a sinner. And I think that's why, verse 12, he is so thankful to God for appointing him, for judging him faithful in this.

[14 : 24] He's thinking, me? Seriously? Me? And it shouldn't surprise us that this was Paul's experience, that as he came to God, he received such lavish mercy, such generous grace.

That was the experience of folks who realized their need and came to Jesus in the Gospels. The woman caught in adultery in John chapter 8.

You know, the Pharisees are bloodthirsty. They're ready to go for this woman. And they drag her before Jesus.

The law says we should stone her. What do you say? And he who is without sin casts the first stone. And of course, one by one, they disappear. And all that's left is Jesus.

The only one left is Jesus. The only one who is without sin. The only one by his own qualification there who is able to stone her.

[15 : 27] But he doesn't. Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more. What about his disciples? Classically, Peter.

I'll never deny you, Jesus. Even if I have to die with you. Even if the others fall away. I'm not going to do that. And then, of course, many of us are familiar.

The complete opposite happens. And he caves in under the pressure. And how does Jesus respond to that? I mean, post-resurrection, I'm thinking if I'm Jesus, I'm going, well, where were you?

You said you were going to be there and you weren't. I would have given Peter a bit of a telling off, I would have thought. But no, Jesus comes.

He cooks the disciples breakfast. He has this amazing one-to-one moment with Peter. Do you love me? And he restores Peter.

[16 : 35] Three times he asks, do you love me? In match of the three denials of Jesus. Jesus is incredibly patient.

Does he not extend mercy to his disciples time and time again? So in Leaven, we're going through Mark's gospel. And it's just so interesting that the belief and unbelief theme that comes up a lot. And it's a little bit with the crowds. It's a little bit with the religious leaders who have sought to be enemies of Jesus from pretty early on.

Very often it's with the disciples. And he doesn't burn them for it. He doesn't attack them for it. No, he is patient with them.

That's been Paul's experience. And I'm sure you can say that's been your experience as well as you've walked with him for years. He's been patient with you. Second of all, Jesus came for you.

[17 : 43] Jesus came for you. So Jesus, as he embarks on his earthly ministry, he is falling out with the religious lot because he makes friends with sinners.

He dines with sinners. He eats with them. He associates with them. And the religious leaders are, how can he eat with such sinners?

Such riffraff. See, they thought they were beyond such people. They certainly thought they were beyond mercy. However, as we get ready for communion tomorrow, for those of us who know our sin, Jesus says such words of good news for you and me tonight.

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. And so for us who know and who recognize our sin, that's the best place to be.

Because we are the exact people that Jesus came for. He didn't come for the imaginary spiritual supergiant who is just nailing it at the Christian life and who's just tip top.

[19 : 00] He came for you. He came for you. He came for you in your need and in your dependence. So as we prepare our hearts for tomorrow, I just want to say a few words of application to you all.

Now you might be here tonight or watching online and not from a church background, but you're just investigating what Christianity is all about.

You're getting a feel for things. You come with a sense maybe you like Jesus. There's a few things you're not sure about. You've got questions about that you're pushing back on. I just want to get you to think for a moment.

Why did Jesus come to die? What was so serious that Jesus had to come in order to give his life? Because of our sin, we are separated from God by nature.

And we can't just bridge that gap once it's there. So what do people who break the laws deserve? Judgment and punishment. That's the way it is with the laws of the land.

[20 : 05] And that's the way it is with God. But the coming of Jesus in his life, death and resurrection was to come to ultimately pay for your sin. To take the punishment that you and I deserve in order that we could go free if we put our trust in him.

He died so that even though we had done wrong, we could be completely forgiven. We could be completely cleansed from all our guilt. Reconciled to God and welcomed in as part of his family. Is sin serious? Is sin serious? Serious enough for Jesus to die? Serious enough for Jesus to give his life for your sin?

So won't you consider putting your trust in him this evening if you haven't done already as your Savior and as your Lord?

And experience the gracious response of God. God, mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation to him. Peace with him when you put your trust in him.

[21 : 13] You might be here tonight and you've been coming to church for a long time. But for whatever reason, you feel you can't come to the Lord's table.

You feel like you can't make that profession. You maybe disqualified yourself because you haven't perhaps measured up to a point at which you think that's what a Christian is and I'm not it.

Well, the good news of the gospel says to you tonight amidst your doubts, amidst your spiritual anxieties, your own lack of goodness, lack of suitability.

Well, it's never been. It is not now. And it never will be about the level of your goodness. It is all about the mercy in Jesus Christ. Do you know the Apostle Paul who we've looked at tonight?

Friends, he didn't come with a sufficient level of godliness, a sufficient level of repentance, a strong enough faith. Do you know how he came? He came as a persecutor.

[22 : 22] He came as a blasphemer. He came as one who attacked the church of God. But what happened? Verse 13, But I received mercy. Because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.

And the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Jesus extended mercy to him and did not treat him as his sins deserved.

Do you know what the Apostle Paul deserved for his sins? Eternal separation from God in hell. But do you know what he got? Grace overflowing.

Grace upon grace upon grace upon grace upon grace. Friends, you might be all too aware of your sins and your failings which you think disqualify you from coming to Jesus.

It's actually your neediness and your sin which qualify you to come to Jesus by faith, to lay a hold of him by faith, trusting in his grace.

[23 : 23] And trusting in him alone. Jesus didn't come for the righteous. Otherwise, he came for no purpose. He came as a savior for sinners. And let me put that more personally.

He came for you. He came for you. Jesus did not come for the righteous who have their life all sorted out. He came for the sinners.

Friends, won't you come to Jesus? Please, come with your neediness and your sin and you will find an abundance of mercy when you come.

What about if this isn't your first communion? You've come many times to the table.

You are a believer. Well, it's first as we prepare our hearts to come tomorrow, the only fitting response is humility and praise. Humility and praise.

[24 : 23] Look at Paul. Pre-conversion, my life was a train wreck, but I received mercy.

Post-conversion, I'm still wrestling with sin. In fact, I'm confident enough of my level of sin to call me the chief of sinners.

Verse 16, but I received mercy. We see that twice. Verse 13, but I received mercy. Pre-conversion. Verse 16, post-conversion, but I received mercy.

Twice over. We're only here because of mercy. And therefore, humility is the only fitting response as we come. We don't come because of how much we serve at church or how well we've got our Bible reading plan nailed down.

We come as sinners in need of mercy, and therefore we come with humility. But we also come with praise because we have received mercy.

We come with praise because we receive mercy, not just at the point of our conversion, but every day since. God has generously and lavishly poured out his mercy upon you.

[25 : 33] His mercies are new every morning, we read in Lamentations 3. Mercy, mercy, mercy is the heartbeat of the Christian life.

When you stumble and you find yourself tripped up in sin again, who is there ready to pick you up? Is it not Jesus?

Is it not his everlasting arms reaching out to you to lift you from the pit? When you find yourself struggling with the same sin patterns, when you look back at your Christian life, whether you've been a Christian five years or 50 years, and you go, I'm still struggling with that.

That's still an issue in my life. How can he be so patient? Be it pride or lust or anger or self-righteousness or gossip.

You think, how can I still be fighting with this? How is this still a problem in my life? Yet who is there in mercy with the precious promises of mercy, grace, and gospel renewal?

[26 : 38] Is it not Jesus Christ there for you? How else can we respond then but with an overflowing joy and adoration and thanksgiving, celebration, gladness, laughter?

In and of yourself, you have no hope of knowing God. But yet in Christ, we are brought near. In Christ, we are forgiven.

In Christ, we are reconciled to God. In Christ, we are one of the family, a child of God. Friends, you might be jolly well fed up of your sin.

You might be tired of tripping up on your failings. But you know what tomorrow is as we come to the table? It is mercy being extended to you.

It's his grace overflowing to you once more. It's his love on full display for you, even despite your sins, even despite the things that trip you up the most, the things that frustrate you most about yourself, the things that embarrass you most about yourself, the things that if anyone else knew, you'd be horrified.

[28 : 00] Even coming in that, Jesus has mercy for you. The bread, the wine, his body broken for you, his blood shed for you. This meal is there because of your weakness.

It's for you. Friends, come tomorrow with humility, knowing that there's nothing in and of ourselves. We haven't earned it. We haven't merited it.

Come with joy and celebration and thanksgiving that though you may say with Paul, I am the chief of sinners, that you might know the grace of our Lord overflowing to you once more.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.