

The Greatest Story Ever Told



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People often complain rightly that the real message of Christmas is lost amidst the revelry of the season. As long as men entertain only vague ideas of the reason for Christ's advent they will miss the real spiritual, lasting joy which the gospel was intended to bring and settle instead for the transient pleasures of sin. The angelic messengers who brought the news of the incarnation of the Son of God to the shepherds of Bethlehem called it "good tidings of great joy" (Luke 2:10). When men are enlightened by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures to see why Christ came into the world, they will realize that this is the greatest story ever told.

The apostle Paul sums up this gospel message in 1 Timothy 1:15: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”

It is *a message concerning helplessness*. Paul speaks of “sinners” who, because they are sinners, need to be saved. In Scripture, the term *sinner* applies to all the descendants of Adam by natural generation (Romans 3:23; 5:12). It indicates our guilt: we have broken the divine law (Romans 3:19). It shows our corruption: we are polluted and dominated by the power of sin (Romans 3:11, 12). It implies our danger: we are under the condemnation of the law. Death—spiritual, physical, and eternal death—is the consequence and penalty (Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 6:23). The word *sinner*, therefore, declares man’s depravity and danger. He needs deliverance from guilt, from bondage, and from hell. But how can he obtain this deliverance? The word of God tells us repeatedly that it is beyond human ability to achieve it.

Here is man’s dilemma. He is totally helpless in this matter. This truth is implicit in 1 Timothy 1:15. Would Christ have come into the world to save men if they possessed the power to effect their own salvation? Would the Father have given His Son to perform a work that could have been accomplished by sinful creatures left to themselves? No, the very fact that Christ’s coming into the world was necessary to save sinners confirms man’s utter helplessness to save himself. The realization of this helplessness is obviously not something which in itself brings “great joy,” but it is the dark background against which the glory of God’s grace in bringing deliverance shines brilliantly.

To the helpless sinner the gospel is *a message conveying hope*. God has looked in pity upon the desperate plight of man. He has not left all mankind to “perish in the estate of sin and misery.” In grace He has purposed, in wisdom He has planned, and in Christ He has provided salvation for sinners. This was the reason for the incarnation of the Son of God. He came voluntarily and gladly, but He came also because He was sent (1 John 4:14). His mission—to do the Father’s will—was one in which He “delighted” (Psalm 40:8). The

Father’s will was that He should accomplish the complete salvation of sinners who would put their trust in Him, not merely assist them in saving themselves. His name was “Jesus” (Saviour), who came into the world “that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17).

This salvation of sinners involved the provision of a perfect righteousness for His people by His life of obedience as their Surety. It involved the payment of their debt to divine justice by His substitutionary death on the cross. And it involved the procurement of the emancipating power of the Holy Spirit for the slaves of sin.

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To fulfil this great work our Saviour was made the “Christ,” the Anointed One, to whom God gave the Holy Ghost without measure (John 3:34; Acts 10:8). By the power of the Holy Ghost He lived (Luke 4:18), offered Himself upon the cross (Hebrews 9:14), and was raised from the dead (Romans 8:11)—His resurrection signifying that His work was complete and that God was well satisfied with it. Upon the grounds of what Christ has done God pardons and justifies the ungodly. This is the message of hope for otherwise helpless sinners.

This salvation is for even the worst of men. Paul speaks of himself as the “chief” of sinners. He had been a blasphemer, a murderer, and a persecutor of the church, yet the grace of God had reached him, and the blood of Christ had redeemed him. Here is good news for Satan’s vilest slaves! As George

Whitefield remarked, “Jesus Christ is willing to receive the devil’s castaways.” Jesus said, “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men” (Matthew 12:31). The apostle John declared, “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1 :7). C. H. Spurgeon describes the greatness of this salvation: “Christ is a great Saviour to meet the great transgressions of great rebels. The vast machinery of redemption was never undertaken for a mean or little purpose. There must be a great end in so great a plan, carried out at so great an expense, guaranteed with such great promises, and intended to bring such great glory to God.” No one should stay away from Christ because of the greatness of his sin, for “He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him” (Hebrews 7:25). Does it all sound too good to be true?

The Holy Spirit emphasizes that *this message is completely trustworthy*. He prefaces it with the words, “This is a faithful saying.” Satan’s intent, in tempting our first parents in Eden, was to present God as a killjoy, a spoilsport, austere, distant and reluctant to bless (see Genesis 3:5). Ever since the fall, man has entertained a suspicion about God’s goodness. Thus, sinners meet the overtures of the gospel with scepticism. They question whether the message is indeed faithful or its promised benefits available to them. God addresses this distrust in a number of ways. Sometimes He does so by repeating the assurances of the gospel, or by confirming His word with an oath (Hebrews 6:13–18), or, as in 1 Timothy 1:15, by introducing the message with a reminder that it is “faithful.” A faithful God has spoken it. It is assuredly true!

It is therefore worthy to be accepted immediately and with joy. This is the greatest message ever brought to perishing souls. Embrace it then. Go to the Saviour with the words of the publican in Luke 18:13, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” You cannot seek Him in vain for He has promised, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). ■



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