

**Christmas**  
**Why Jesus Came**  
**I Tim 1:12-17; Heb 2:17-18**

I have not had the privilege of sitting next to my wife during a worship service very often lately. And, about three quarters of the way through our time, she leaned over to me and wrote these words into my mind. This church has so much talent. Yes. Amen. Thankful for that. Great to sing hymns and to hear the story one more time. I want to thank Rob for leading us in the reading God's Word today. I'm going to be leaving tomorrow morning, and it's because the pastors of this church sort of blessed me, blessedly pushed me out and said, go home, go home. Be with your family. And I said, no, no, I have a sense of duty, and I want to be here for Christmas Eve. And they said, no, no, go home. We're fine. There's a lot of talent in this church. They said, no, that's not what they said. They said, we've got this covered. We'll be all right. And Rob will be giving two of the messages on Christmas Eve and Jim Alexander, another and I am deeply grateful for the team of musicians, but also teachers and preachers and pastors and elders that the Lord has brought here.

So tonight, a relatively short meditation sort of thoughts, we might say, on the meaning of what we've been studying with scriptures and with hymns so far. And if I may, I'm going to hold off on reading the Bible for a few minutes and tell you instead about, a boy, a boy named Arthur who lived a long time ago, and he was born to a nobleman whom he never met. He never met his father, and he was an orphan, but he was adopted. Not exactly by one person, but by a group of people, a group of people who lived long ago in a castle. And in that castle there was a very kindly lord, Sir Ector, who took him under his wing and cared for him in a variety of ways, and after a while decided that he needed to find a proper mentor, since he was of noble blood. It happened that a certain man philosopher with special skills named Merlin was in the castle, and it was determined that Merlin should be Arthur's tutor and mentor, taught him all sorts of things. But being a magician, this is, by the way, not a true story because you're wondering. But being a magician, he wanted to use his powers to educate the young lad and turned him at one point into an ant.

And ants are taken up with one thing food and duty. Their duty is to find food, and when they find food, they've fulfilled their duty. And so young Arthur learned about work, food, and duty. And then he was made into a hawk. And hawks can soar above the earth, and they have a grand view of everything. But their minds are set on one thing and one thing only. And that is the hunt. And then he turned him into a fish. Now fish had the advantage of no backaches, no foot problems. But they too have a very limited life, and they're very limited life. They try to eat and avoid being eaten. That is their life. Eat and not be eaten. And it was the thought of Merlin, at least as the story is told, because Merlin probably never existed.

As the story is told to give Arthur a perspective on life so he would understand the people that he would serve one day, for he in fact became King Arthur of the Round Table, in case you didn't know what was coming. I know some of you did. Now, this story is meant to be modeled in certain ways after the story of Jesus, who, of course, took on a different form from his ordinary form.

Being God from all eternity, he took the form of a man, not the form of an ant or hawk, but probably Jesus found it almost as limiting as we would find it to become an ant, or a hawk or a fish. It's also true

that Jesus, like Arthur, was not recognized by anyone at first. It's also true that Arthur was known and loved by all because as a nobleman, he spent time with nobility, and he was also unknown. And so he spent time with ordinary folk, and everybody loved him. And in a way, all of his education was for the benefit of his people, rather like Jesus again. But there are many ways in which the story of Arthur is not like the way of Jesus. Because Jesus did not come for some educational enterprise, he didn't need to be educated in any particular way. Rather, he came with a very definite goal. Now, when people travel, they sometimes do it for the sake of it, and I like to sometimes read stories of great adventurers who did things like hike to the North Pole or hike to the South Pole, or sail through the islands of the Pacific. And people do that just to find it.

Another people travel with a purpose. For example, Marco Polo traveled about three years to go to China in order to get very rich in the trade of spices and in fact, he did. Now Jesus was more like Marco Polo than like Arthur, or like the people who explored the North and the South Pole. He had a very definite reason, knew why he was coming. But unlike Marco Polo, there's no quite parallel. Marco Polo traveled to get rich, and Jesus traveled to get poor. In fact, if you're traveling over the season, I hope you're not flying on a plane. You may see somebody trying to get an upgrade on the plane, move up to some class with more legroom, or you may see somebody trying to get a better hotel room. They're looking for an upgrade. Jesus came looking for a downgrade to become like us. And in that way, he became a merciful and faithful high priest. As Hebrews two says, for this reason, he had to be made like his brothers in every way. As brothers and sisters, we might say today, in order that he may become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, that he might make an atonement for sins.

Now Jesus, of course, is merciful because God is merciful and he takes pity on his creatures who harm themselves and fall into the wrong path. He's also merciful, we might say, because he does know what it's like to be tempted, not the way we are tempted, because our bad habits and bad ways and our internal sinfulness push us to yield to temptation.

Jesus was not in any way tainted by sin, but he is merciful because he had our life for a period of time. Now, we didn't just come to learn mercy. There's all kinds of statements in the New Testament about why Jesus came. May I read a couple of them to you from John chapter 12? Jesus says, I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

Jesus came as light to deliver us from darkness. John 18:37 I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me. Jesus said, I came to win people to the truth. And then, of course, maybe the most important next to the one that we know the best is John 3:17. God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Now the Apostle Paul meditates on this in first Timothy chapter one, verses 12 to 17. And this is what it says, Paul, meditating close to the end of his life as he's giving the apostolic role to Timothy and to Titus, so that they'll know how to conduct themselves, how to preach. He says this I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to a service even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man.

I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here's a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst, or the chief, or the foremost, depending on your translation.

They're all good translations of what Jesus says. For that reason, he continues, I was shown mercy, so that in me the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience could be translated. All patience is full. Patience is complete. Patience as an example, a mark, an imprint made in this world. As an example, an imprint of mark.

In this world, the those who believe in him receive eternal life. Let's pray for just a moment.

Heavenly father, I pray that we would hear these words afresh, as familiar as they are, and take away something a little bit more about your coming. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.

So Paul describes himself. He says the marvel, the marvel of Christ appointing me to a service as an apostle, as a planter of churches, as a writer of books. The marvel to me, he says, is it God now regards me faithful, even though I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent, arrogant man? It's true. It's not hyperbole. He was a blasphemer. He not only believe Jesus was evil, he tried to get other people to blaspheme, and in fact tried to force them to do so to renounce the faith. He was a persecutor. It's not an exaggeration. He threw people in prison. He beat believers. He thought he was serving God as he did so. He was violent.

The word this used for violent means, sort of, something like, proudly violent, gladly violent, convinced it's good to be violent. He thought he was doing good. He was proud. Is insulin is so sure of himself. Until, of course, one day he became God's servant. He says he received mercy because he acted in ignorance. If you remember the story of Paul's conversion, when Jesus appears to Paul, Paul does not say, oh no, it's you.

He says, who are you? I don't know who you are. I don't know what I've been doing. He was acting in ignorance. And Jesus says, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. And Paul immediately repents because he realizes he was doing everything wrong. He was acting in ignorance. Now listen, acting in ignorance is not an excuse for sin.

If you do the wrong thing, you don't know it's a sin. It's still a sin. But if you do the wrong thing and you don't know it's a sin, you are at least not hard hearted. You're not deliberate in your sin. Let me give you a simple example. Many of you have driven in other countries right? And if you drive in another country, you know that one of the things you need to do is learn the rules of that country.

And so when you go from place to place, which I have done, I've driven in at least two countries I can think of where people drive on the wrong side of the road and one of those times, one of those times I was on a very narrow street, really, and there were other cars around, and there were no clues in other cars driving on the left side of the road.

And as a consequence, I immediately fell back because I was thinking about what I've been doing. I immediately fell back into driving on the right side of the road. I'd forgotten. Now, if a policeman had stopped me, he might have looked at me and said, are you perchance an American? And if I had said, yes, I'm an American, he would say something like, I thought so, because you see, in this country we drive on the left side of the road.

Now the chances of me immediately going out and deliberately driving on the right side of the road one minute later are, we would agree, very, very low. Right. But if, if while in England, I went rampaging

through a red light just sliding right through and, you know, nice full speed because I felt like it because I'm not in America and do whatever I want.

And the policeman pulls me over and says, are you perchance an American? Yes. Did you know that red means stop here and in America? Yes, I did. Now, if I run through a red light, very deliberately know exactly what the rules are doing it on purpose. What are the chances? I'll do it again. Chances are high, are they not?

Because a deliberate misdeed is always more willful and more dangerous to the soul than an accidental misdeed. So it was with Paul. He says, I didn't know what I was doing. Yes, I was a blasphemer. Yes, I was a persecutor. But Christ have mercy on me because I acted in ignorance, and he made me faithful. You may be faithful to proclaim his gospel, which is found one more time in verse 15.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. Now every word is loaded, because when it says Christ, it means the one who is appointed and anointed and empowered as prophet, priest, and king to do what profits priests and kings do. Now, of course, in the Old Testament, kings rule and prophets proclaim, and priests offer sacrifices.

And Jesus does all three. Christ Jesus. And we know that his name means the Lord saves. Yahweh saves. So Christ came to save, as the Lord does. Psalm 130 says it this way, O Israel, put your hope in the Lord. For with the Lord is unfailing love, and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all her sins.

Christ Jesus came. That is to say, Jesus preexisted he was somewhere else. And then he came here. He came here. He came as a child. And I know you know this, but not simply as a child, as also preexistent God taking flesh. And if we talk to our friends about the Christmas season, one of the points we might want to make if we have an unbelieving friend, one of the points we might want to make is that we get a little bit too enthralled with baby Jesus, and don't think about the fact that it's Lord at his birth.

Now I'm hesitate, but I'm going to I'm going to not identify a movie that I'm not exactly quoting, okay? Because it's not a good movie and it doesn't deserve to be quoted and recognized. But there is a scene in this movie in which a very dimwitted man. It's a comedy, a dimwitted man says in a prayer at Christmas time. I want to take time to thank you for my family, dear infant tiny baby Jesus. And he goes on and on about Jesus, baby, baby Jesus. And his wife interrupts him and says, you know, sweetie, Jesus did grow up. He had a beard. He became a man. And when you say grace, it's off putting to talk about baby Jesus, tiny baby Jesus for the little balled up fist all the time. He was a man. And that's a corrective you don't expect out of silly comedies, but it is one we need this baby Jesus. And so also the vine Jesus, because he came from somewhere else and he came into this world with its beat up shoes and beat up cars and marks on your clothes because you tried to get a bite before he came to church. And you dribbled some spaghetti sauce on your shirt. This world and all of its flaws, all of its mundane traits. He came into the world to save sinners. Of whom Paul says, I am the worst and I just keep on meditating on that because he says not.

I was the worst, but I am the worst. Now, it's certainly true that he was the worst. He was a persecutor and a blasphemer, and a violent man tried to get Christians to renounce their Lord. And when they wouldn't, he threw them in jail. He was terrible. It's awful. And yet he doesn't say I was the worst. He says I am the worst because he's aware that he still needs Jesus as our Savior.

I'm fully aware that I'm speaking at night to the people who choose to come at night. And what I want to say is, while it's absolutely right to focus as we do in this church, rightly so on telling people about the gospel and inviting them to believe for the first time. But we want to be, and I believe we are a church that is soaked in the gospel.

It's not something we need one time at the beginning. We need it every day. We need to repent. We need to preach the gospel to ourselves every single day. When you cut us, we should bleed gospel because we need the gospel every day. And we can all say, I'm the worst of sinners. Not because we think there's nobody who's done worse than us in all human history, but we're the sinner we know the most.

We know the truth about the way we sin, our thoughts and our selfishness and our opportunities to good do good that we pass by because we're just tired. We don't know the hearts of others, and we shouldn't judge the hearts of others. We know our own heart. And so we can say, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am.

I still need Jesus, a Savior of sinners. And then he says this final thing in verses 16 and 17. He says to Timothy, and to us, this, this salvation that came my way is remarkable. He says, I was show mercy is the worst of sinners. Verse 16, so that Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience. I just want to talk about those words a tiny bit unlimited, just the way they translate a word.

This means all, all macros to me, which is putting off wrath, putting wrath at a distance, every bit of putting wrath at a distance. Was needed for me because I deserve wrath. There's never anybody who deserved God's wrath more than Paul. And he didn't receive God's wrath. Unlimited patience. And it says example as an example for us, and it's just a mild word for it. The word is an imprint, like when you take a hammer and you smash hot metal, it's an imprint. It's something that makes an impression. It's not merely an example, it's something that's stamped into the world so that we would see for all time that the worst possible sinner can be redeemed, can be put on God's team, and continues to need that.

That's a good word. If we share the gospel with a friend this year. But the best word is Christ. Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom we all are the first, the most, the most in need of the gospel.

Let's pray for a minute. Heavenly father, I thank you for this time in song. I thank you for readings. I thank you for songs we can sing, hymns that were written for the church, and I thank you for songs that were written that we probably can't sing very well. And it's better to have a soloist or perhaps a duet sing for us. Thank you for all these songs that bring us to you and to your redemption, and we thank you for one more. One of the richest of all the hymns ever written, The First Noel. And so, Lord, give us grateful hearts and a desire to celebrate your grace, your unlimited patience, even for us. We pray in Jesus name.

Amen.