

# 1 Timothy 1:17

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[ 0 : 00 ] I want to speak tonight, I was going to preach on numbers and it was just a little bit heavy and you have been so good these last six weeks in the boiling heat struggling so I thought I'd not preach on numbers and preach on God and I want to do that from the first letter of Paul to Timothy.

And he says to the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

And I want to speak tonight on a great God. It's a wonderful little section and there are three greats here. There is a great change. You remember the Apostle Paul, he went around persecuting, threatening, throwing people into prison and he changes from a persecutor of Jesus Christ to the greatest preacher of Jesus Christ.

The greatest Christian thinker of the ages. And then in verse 15 there's a great saying isn't there? Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners.

So I want us to look at a great God. Verse 17, it's a doxology, that is an outburst of praise. Paul has been looking back at his conversion, how he became a Christian and he cries out with joy and with gratitude.

[ 1 : 35 ] And as he thinks what the Lord has done for him, he says, doesn't he, to the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

It's rather striking because usually doxologies come at the end. But this doesn't come at the end. It comes at the end of a tiny section. He can't keep it in though.

If you turn to chapter 6 and verses 15 to 16, you'll see that he does it again. He bursts out in praise. It's a common thing. Verse 15, it comes in the middle of an argument.

He who is the blessed and only sovereign, the king of kings and the lord of lords, who alone is immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.

To him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen. And it's a very common thing for Paul to do, just to burst out in praise. And so at the end of saying what God has done for him, he wants to praise God.

[ 2 : 36 ] Now let's go from the sublime to the ridiculous. It's the exact opposite of Jack Horner, isn't it? You know, at that nursery rhyme, it's a little Jack Horner sat in his corner eating his Christmas pie, put in his thumb and he pulled out a plum and he said, what a good boy am I.

It's very interesting, isn't it? There's no such testimony like that in the New Testament. And that's not just because it's something stupid to say, but I think the outsider often looks at people like us and they think that when we're giving our testimony, that when we praise God, that we're saying, aren't I good?

Aren't I great? What a good boy am I. And there is, I think, sometimes a good deal of self-satisfaction in our praise and that's what the outsider thinks and they're not wholly wrong. But let's say that the true Christian, a New Testament people, when they give praise to God, they never sing to me be the glory, great things I have done. They cry to God be the glory, great things he has done.

So love to you the word that he gave us his son. And far being from like Jack Horner, look at the end of verse 15. Paul says in the present tense, not the perfect tense or the past tense, he says in verse 15, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I'm the foremost.

[ 4 : 02 ] And that's the opposite, isn't it, of self-congratulation. Paul realises that he's far away from this kind of moral purity of the greatness and the holiness of God.

So the testimony of the Apostle Paul in this passage is what a great God is God. God is glorious. So we have in this paragraph an experience of a man who came to know God.

And this knowledge of God is something for head and for heart. That's what Christ has brought to mankind. That knowledge of God is more important even than any of the fruits of the knowledge of

God.

So you see some of the fruits of the knowledge of God in this passage. Look at verse 12. He thanks God for calling him to serve God. And to serve God is really an unspeakable privilege.

And yet it's not as important as knowing him. In verse 14 he talks about faith and love. And they are wonderful things, aren't they? The love of a Christian for the world and for other people, for his neighbour.

[ 5 : 09 ] That's a wonderful thing. But that is a secondary thing to the love that is kindled in his heart by knowledge of God. And so Augustine, that famous quote to me, he said, You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.

And that is what we're made for. The chief end of man is to glorify God. And enjoy him forever. That's the point of life. And if we miss the knowledge of God, that Paul is explaining here, we'll find in our lives a great gap.

A hollowness and an unreality. And that's what we see all around us, don't we? People who've got so much, so much wealth, so much to be thankful for. And yet without God there's this tremendous gap and this tremendous vacuum.

Nobody and nothing can fill that gap. And Paul came by the mercy of God, to a knowledge of God. And he glories in it. So three things about God tonight.

Number one, in this passage we see the sovereignty of God. And number two, we see the grace of God. And number three, the patience of God. That comes out really clearly in verse 17.

[ 6 : 16 ] He says, to the king of the ages. And Paul glories in the sovereignty of God. This God in Christ has chosen him mercifully.

And through his perfect patience. It stands out in verse 17. And it's there again in chapter 6 and verse 15. It says, he who is the blessed and only sovereign.

The king of kings. And the lord of lords. Now the sovereignty of God and his lordship and his kingship is probably, I think, the greatest theme of the Bible.

And the Bible makes a very clear distinction between God and man in this regard. When man and sovereignty are put together, we get a very difficult situation, don't we?

Because man cannot bear to be given sovereignty without misusing it. I mean absolute sovereignty. So do you remember the person at school who was elevated and given tremendous authority?

[ 7 : 24 ] The person at school who was maybe made head of something or chief prefect? And what happened to them? They became impossible, didn't they? And it often happens in your office, isn't it? When people are promoted.

And when we praise ourselves for our democratic way of life in the West, it's actually a curious backhanded compliment, isn't it? Because the whole essence of democracy is that we can't trust anyone to have complete sovereignty.

And so we see that power spread out amongst everybody. Democracy testifies that we are not trustworthy. Human beings and sovereignty do not go well together.

It is very difficult, isn't it, to handle power. But in fact, God has absolute power. And the Old Testament and the New Testament writers, they glory in the fact that he has absolute power.

The Bible writers say that God dominates all things and all men and women and boys and girls. He disposes of all things. And all men and women and boys and girls in history and in creation.

[ 8 : 34 ] Do you remember when Job was in hospital? And he's covered with boils, boy laws. And he's visited by three friends who unfortunately were theologians.

And they get completely worse, don't they? And their visits make things far worse for Job. I don't know whether you've ever done that when you go and visit someone. I've occasionally done that when people are in hospital. They felt awful before and they felt even worse after I've been.

But they got completely confused, didn't they? And they said some ridiculous things. And Job himself begins to say some very, very foolish things about himself and about God.

And at the end of the book, God speaks to Job. And Job listens. And listen to Job's testimony. Job answered the Lord and said, I know that you can do all things.

And that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I've uttered what I did not understand. Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

[ 9 : 40 ] What's he saying there? He's saying, please forgive me, I've been a fool. I didn't understand who you were. I now realise that you are the sovereign God.

And that for Job was the beginning of sanity. And it is for many people today. Now this sovereignty of God, that God is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and in control of absolutely everything, is not always evident, is it?

It's not always evident when you read the news. And yet the believers of the Old Testament, they never had any doubt that what happened to Israel and what happened around them in the world was because God was sovereign.

Let me show you that. Let me read to you from Psalm 99. The Lord reigns, the psalmist says. Let the peoples tremble. He sits enthroned upon the cherubim.

Let the earth quake. The Lord is great in Zion. He is exalted over the peoples. Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he.

[10:44] The king in his might loves justice. You've established equity. You've executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the Lord our God.

Worship at his footstool. Holy is he. Isn't that interesting? Sheer, naked power never interests the psalmist by itself.

God is sovereign. But as the psalmist sings of the sovereignty of God. Of the Lord who lays bare his arm. Of the God who can do what he wants in his world.

It's so remarkable, isn't it? That the sovereignty of God is always linked to his holiness. And so when God acts in power, he acts righteously.

What a contrast to us. And so if God is sovereign, what is the most difficult matter that God has to deal with in the universe? We think, don't we, that there's nothing that we can't control.

[11:44] And make useful to humankind. And it is remarkable, isn't it, to watch human beings can control in the last 50 to 100 years. We can control creation in many, many ways.

But we cannot control ourselves, can we, the poisons within. We have extraordinary technical power, but we have an inability to control ourselves.

We might be able to control the universe, but the Bible is very, very clear that the most intractable evil is to be found in the human heart. And to subdue my heart. And to turn my heart from enmity and hatred into love.

To turn my perversity into something lovely. Well that needs the power of God. And so let's read how that happens. Come with me to Galatians chapter 1.

Galatians chapter 1. And the Apostle Paul, do you remember what he was? A violent persecutor. And we have a description of how he was changed.

[12:45] Galatians chapter 1 and verses 13 to 16. It's on page 972. And Paul says, for you have heard. You have heard of my former life in Judaism.

How I persecuted the church of God violently and I tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people. So extremely zealous was I for the tradition of my fathers.

But when he who had set me apart before I was born. And who called me by his grace. Was pleased to reveal his son to me. In order that I might preach him among the Gentiles.

I did not immediately consult with anyone. Neither did I go to Jerusalem. But I went away. Back into Arabia. And I returned again to Damascus. And I just noticed the change. Notice the calmness of that change.

It's rather like the miracles of the gospel. That we saw this morning. So simple and so uncomplicated. That it is as if God with a word.

[13:48] Setting free from the grip of evil. I was going against the truth for all I was worth. But when he would set me apart before I was born. Chose to reveal Christ to me. Well that was the end of the old way.

In the beginning and the new. In Paul's case it was particularly dramatic. I doubt whether it was as dramatic for any of us here. But the reality and the end is the same.

When we talk about God's sovereignty. This kingship. Lots of people get really restless. They think that I'm suggesting. That God is giving us no freedom.

And no responsibility. I want to say that is not true. God respects our humanity. In fact the biblical doctrine of God's sovereignty. Does not imagine for a moment. That God treats us like robots.

The Bible assumes that we are given our humanity. It is fully recognised by God. And we are made in his image. And apart from sin and the fall. We have a real freedom.

[ 14 : 46 ] And yet even though we use that freedom. Against God all our lives. His will is done. When everyone rose up against Jesus of Nazareth. Romans. Gentiles.

Everyone. And they did their absolute worst. At the cross of Calvary. We see the worst crime in human history. And God causes in his sovereignty. That to be the most wonderful demonstration. Of his saving love. So impossible to fathom. When the government in China. So strongly and violently. Drove out Christians.

And all foreign missionaries. In 1951. And they sought in the most powerful way. That man can do. To obliterate every mark. Of the Christian church in China. Men used their freedom. And they used it against God. And they deliberately blasphemed. The cause of Christ. And the result today. Is that the church in China. Is far bigger. Far greater.

[ 15 : 44 ] Far more vigorous. Than it has ever been before. And there's one difference. Isn't it? It's now led by the Chinese. And that is God's sovereignty. God knew.

That his church in China. Could never be a real church. While it was led by foreigners. And the only way. For the foreigners to go. Was for the enemies of Christ. To drive them out. And that is sovereignty.

There's so many ways. Isn't it? The Bible teaches. God's sovereignty. One of the ways. By prophecy. The prophet did. Fourth tell. He spoke the word of God.

To his own generation. But he also foretold. What would happen. In the future. So impossible. To tell the future. Isn't it? Forecasting things. Is it?

In the financial markets. Or the weather. Who would have thought. We'd have a heat wave. That's lasted for as long as it has. Who would have thought. Croatia. Would get to the world cup final.

[ 16 : 41 ] Who would have thought. England. Would get to the semi-final. To try and predict the future. Is a man's game. Isn't it? Only God can do it. But God looks into the future. And he can tell.

What will happen. Days from now. Weeks from now. Hundreds of years from now. And he can do that. Because he's sovereign. Well Paul. Marvels at the sovereignty of God.

But he also marvels. At the grace of God. Look at verse 14. Of 1 Timothy 1. And the grace of our Lord. Overflowed for me. With the faith and love.

That are in Christ Jesus. One of the best things. About camp in Swansea. Is we will go to Rosili Bay. It's in the top 10 beaches. In the world. And those are few.

We love it don't we? It's quite dangerous. We've not lost any children. But the waves are massive. And when the waves are really massive. You pretty much can't stand up.

[ 17 : 36 ] You notice like when you go in the seas. And you stand up. And you just get to your feet. And another one hits you. And over you go again. It's like a great wave. And that's the picture in verse 14.

The wave of God's grace. Knocked him over. It comes and knocks away all the hatred. And leaves in its place love.

It knocks away all the unbelief. And it leaves in its place faith. And to whom did this happen? It happened to the one in verse 13. Who was a blasphemer.

Persecutor. And an insolent opponent. And that is the grace of God. And the grace of God means God is pleased to bring the enemies of God to himself.

We could go to lots of places in the gospel. So you could go to Mark chapter 2. Where Jesus chooses Levi the tax collector. And I often wonder about that story.

[ 18 : 36 ] Is that Jesus goes to the four disciples he's already chosen. Andrew, Peter, James and John. And he sits them down. And he says boys. I want to talk to you about the fifth man that will join the band. The next disciple.

Well I've decided to choose Levi. And their faces drop. And after Jesus goes to get a cup of coffee. There's a hurry in this discussion. One of them has chosen to go and see Jesus.

And say Master Lord. We've got something to say. That if you're going to choose him. We've got to quit. Because that will ruin your cause. And we can't have anything to do with him.

And you probably don't understand who he is. You probably certainly don't understand his background. Let me fill you in what his CV is like. Well I don't know how they came to terms with it. But it is isn't it? A lovely illustration of grace.

God choosing not a good guy. But somebody who everyone hated. And rightly so. And it's so important isn't it? That we get this clear. That when God laid his hand on you.

[ 19 : 35 ] And God laid his hand on me. That was a great risk to the future of this church. To choose you to be a Christian. For certainly to dirty the water.

And if you know your own heart. You will know that you are more likely. Aren't you? To let Jesus down. Than to do the cause good. And sovereign grace is where it all starts. Because God takes that which is unworthy.

And purpose is to change us. And to make something which. He is pleased with. And that is sovereign grace. It's a glorious thing to do.

Let me read you a similar kind of story to Mark 2. In Acts chapter 9. In Acts chapter 9. And verse 26. The apostle Paul. Came to Jerusalem. When he came to Jerusalem.

He said he attempted to join the disciples. And there's this fascinating phrase. And they were all afraid of him. Because they did not believe that he was a disciple. The future apostle is going to come to our church.

[ 20 : 44 ] How would they react? They didn't want him there. And they all said with one voice. We're not sure he's a disciple after all. There's no way that we are going to believe.

That this man is now on our side. Why were they like that? They were like that. Because it's so hard to believe. In sovereign grace.

And when we believe in sovereign grace. We will go after the most unlikely converts. It's interesting isn't there. Certain phrases that remain in our culture. One of them is.

They're not for the grace of God. Go I. People still say that. Even though they're not Christians. But that is true isn't it? As we see people are not Christians.

Have not found this truth. We have to say. Well there but for the grace of God go I. He praises God for his sovereignty. He praises God for his grace. And then lastly. He praises God for his patience.

[ 21 : 48 ] Look at verse 16. Of 1 Timothy chapter 1. I love it. But I receive mercy for this reason.

That in me is the foremost. Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience. And that is. The very nature of God. When God had descended.

To meet with Moses. Do you remember what he says? He says in Exodus 35. The Lord passed before him. And proclaimed the Lord. The Lord.

A God merciful and gracious. Slow to anger. Abounding in steadfast love. And faithfulness. I use this association quite a lot.

But if you said to one of my children. Oh they're lovely children. They're just a little bit slow. I would be angry at that. I wouldn't like that. But God is slow isn't he?

[ 22 : 45 ] God is slow to anger. Patient. Patient. It's a very foolish thing for you tonight. To presume on that patience. But how thankful we ought to be tonight.

That God is slow to punish. These are the things. They are closely related aren't they? His patience. His grace. And his sovereignty. And they are wonderful things. And yet. I think.

Very often. These things. Make us feel somewhat uncomfortable. Because they put you and I in our place. Let's say you finish training as a teacher.

And the head teacher. Walks you on your first day. Down the stairs. And along the corridor to your class. That is going to be yours for the coming year. And just before the head teacher opens the door.

She says to you. I want to tell you. That you're going to need a lot of patience with this lot. And she opens the door. And your heart would start to sink. Wouldn't it? Well God looks down on us.

[ 23 : 41 ] And he sends his son Jesus Christ into the world. And it's as though the heavenly angels. Realise that God is going to need. Infinite patience. And infinite grace.

And infinite power to make anything of us. But because God is willing to do that. Two things happen. Verse 12. 1 to Z 1.

Two things happen. The believer thanks him. And so tonight. Before this summer break. Will you thank him? Will you thank him? That's the first thing.

And then in verse 16. The unbeliever comes to trust him. The unbeliever comes to trust him. That the Lord Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience.

As an example to those who believe in him for eternal life. So let that be an example to you tonight. That God has been patient with so many of us.

[ 24 : 44 ] And he's been patient with you. So put your trust in Jesus Christ. And so you may trust his grace. And his patience. And his sovereign power.

And in his mercy. You too may come to experience the eternal life. That is the privilege of every Christian. Let's pray.