

Christ Jesus Came Into The World To Save Sinners

I Timothy 1:12-17, Trinity Sunday VII

July 6, 2008

Beloved of the Lord.....Perhaps, by the grace of God, this July fourth we were able to rest and relax from work, and enjoy the many freedoms God has given us in our country. Certainly this year's Independence Day had to be special for those Americans who recently returned to the states, having been rescued and set free from their Columbian captors. If you've followed the news at all you know of the daring and successful rescue of several hostages, and how they suddenly discovered their freedom as they flew away in the helicopter. Can you imagine their joy? Indeed we should thank God daily for the freedoms He has given us in our country, but more importantly let us thank Him for having liberated us free from sin and death and the power of the devil. It is the Gospel which sets us free from our sins, for the Gospel declares unto us Christ. "Being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Rom. 6:22

In our lesson today, we will see the joy the apostle Paul had, when the Lord rescued him from sin. For though he once was just as wicked as those Colombian rebels who tormented and held these prisoners, Christ delivered and opened the eyes of Saul, making him the humble and hard working Paul. May God open our eyes this morning that the light of the Gospel set us free.

I. Saul, the murderer. We begin with the understanding of what kind of man Paul was before his conversion. Before his conversion, Paul was Saul, a murderer, a zealous Jew, a Pharisee, who went about from city to city, capturing and apprehending Christians, putting them to death. He was much like the zealous Muslim of our day, who threatens Christians to deny the faith and confess "allah", or be put to death. In the heart of such a person there is only hatred of Christ, a blind devotion to the devil. The Bible says, "Saul,....made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison." "Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest." Saul was worse than the Colombian rebels who kidnapped and held people hostage for years. Saul captured Christians so that the Jews could kill them. Paul describes his past life saying, I "was before a blasphemers, and a persecutor, and injurious."

If we had lived in Saul's day, what would we think of him? Perhaps we would pray that the Lord would punish and put to death this wicked blasphemer. Perhaps we would challenge or tempt God and say, "Lord, where is your justice? I thought you punished the wicked? Why do you allow this Saul to live?" The recently

released hostages might have prayed the same thing for years regarding their Columbian captors. For that matter, why doesn't God smite and kill all the wicked today? After all, God says in Isaiah 13:11, "I will punish the world for *their* evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible." Wouldn't the world be a better place for all Christians, if God smote, punished, and destroyed all the wicked sinners so that there would only be Christians left? There would be no more murder, no more rape, no more suffering children, no more bloodshed, no more violence or racism. There would be no more lazy people, no drug addicts or thieves. Why then doesn't God just destroy the wicked and be done with it? But dear sinner, would you still be living, if God destroyed the wicked? Would I? Are you one of the good people and everybody else is evil? Are we any better than Saul? Every sin that you can see so clearly in Saul.....every sin which you can see so clearly in those Colombian rebels; God Himself sees in your heart. If you have ever hated your brother, father, mother, son or daughter, if you have ever been angry without just and perfect cause, you are a murderer. If you have ever coveted and wanted your neighbor's money, you are a thief. If we cannot see or confess these sins, if we cannot see that we are by nature a rebel, a murderer, an adulterer, a thief, then the blindfold that was once about the head of those kidnapped Americans, is yet firmly wrapped around our eyes. Those who deny their sin and wickedness still live in the darkness of sin. Such are yet in need of repentance, and without repentance they will die and perish everlastingly.

The real reason God does not always or immediately punish the wicked is because of His mercies. "If is of the Lord's mercies that we are consumed. His compassions fail not." The Bible says the Lord "is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Pet. 3:9 The point is God wants to rescue and save the evil people, through the blood of His only-begotten Son. We rejoice and gladly receive this truth when we realize we are the evil ones who need to be rescued and saved.

II. It is Christ that opens our eyes from darkness, to see the light of life. There is only one person who is able to open the eyes of the blind, that they might receive sight: his name is Jesus Christ, the Lord. Jesus came to rescue sinners. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." He came to save and deliver the very people who blasphemed and persecuted His holy name. On the road to Damascus God appeared to Saul, and smote him with blindness, that He might open Saul's eyes to His grace. In Damascus, with Christ-like love, Ananias said to Saul, "Brother Saul, the Lord even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that

thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." The eyes of Saul were opened when he realized the very Jesus he persecuted, was the very Lord who came to save Saul from his sin. The love which Jesus had toward Saul, overwhelmed the hatred of Saul toward Christ. Jesus rescues sinners from the darkness of their sin. Jesus is the Light of Life. "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Saul's eyes being opened, God now called Paul to be a preacher of the Gospel. Paul would preach good tidings of great joy to all people, and "open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins." Truly it was a mark of God's grace, that God could take a murderer such as Saul, and so transform him that he now sought only to preach Christ crucified! With all humility Paul says, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." Paul was happy to do the work God called him to do. He would no longer serve sin, but he would serve Christ alone. His sins of the past were also forgiven, for what he did he did in ignorance. This brings comfort to us as well, for the sins we do in ignorance are without number. Christ paid for these sins as well. Only let us remember that whenever and wherever we see our sins we are to sincerely repent of them in our heart, and not do them again. The strength you need to fight such sins is found in the forgiveness of Christ. That is why we need to receive communion often, "to obtain strength for a holier life." We constantly need God's grace to live and "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God." Only faith in Christ transforms, changes, and empowers each believer.

Beloved of the Lord, what Christ has done for Saul, He also has done for you. God has rescued us from our sins as well. We are the hostages, the prisoners of sin on earth. It is the devil who by sin leads us about as hostages, captive to his will alone. But Jesus comes down from heaven above to earth below. In order to free us He makes our sins His own, enduring the wrath of God upon the cross that we might be set free. He first through the law opens our eyes to our sin, and then He opens our eyes to His salvation. Jesus has come to rescue us, Jesus has come to set us free. Jesus is you Savior!

Paul writes, "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." This Gospel truth was the source of all Paul's unwavering strength. It is also the unwavering strength of each believing heart. "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things

to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This grace of God through Christ Jesus was Paul's unchangeable hope. This grace constantly strengthened Paul so that his ministry bore much fruit, and through the preaching of the Gospel, many prisoners were set free. This grace is our strength too, and it is really all we need as Christians to make it through the hard and difficult times of life, for God says, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." God gives you this same wonderful grace in the Lord's Supper today. The same grace which strengthened Paul, will also strengthen you.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the Pharisee must leave, when we realize we are the same as Paul, chief of sinners. Our sins must become large in our minds, that Christ and His forgiveness become all the greater. He is not our Savior from small sins, but large sins without number. "The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." We always begin as Pharisees, as Paul once began as Saul. But Jesus comes to rescue the murderers, the adulterers, the rebels by paying our ransom with His own blood. He "gave Himself a ransom for all." Through the very blood of the Son of God, Jesus has set you free. Live then as the redeemed and free creature that you are. "Now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever." Amen.

Pastor Tobin Pederson, 7685 Maple Hill Rd. Corcoran, MN, 55340, 763-494-5164, solideogloria96@comcast.net srmn0700