

The oldest university in America is Harvard. When you think of Harvard, you think of a bastion of Christian thought, rooted in Scripture for the promotion of the gospel? Me neither. But actually, it was founded that way in 1620. It began as a way for the colonists to train their ministers in the gospel. In its early years, half of its graduates became pastors. In the 1700s, things began changing, as the school faced the increasing pressures of secularism. By 1805 the school adopted a unitarian position, that is, a denial of the orthodox teaching of the Trinity. By the early 1900, Christianity all together was eliminated from Harvard's curriculum entirely.

I tell you this information because this is, unfortunately, the way Christian institutions, churches included. Typically, they are started by a man with great conviction and power, a man with vision and convening power, who can mobilize an army of helpers to reach a goal. And under his leadership the organization thrives, expands, reaches far and wide. And then, at some point, he passes the baton. And too often the person coming after him, though perhaps competent to manage the structures and systems of the institution, doesn't hold the same steel conviction. And, almost imperceptibly, drifts from the founding principles.

This is every leader's concern. Who will take the baton? Who holds my convictions and can replicate the work being done? And I sense that Paul felt this way as he put his pen to paper and began to write this letter to Timothy.

The collection of 27 books in the New Testament were letters, documents, histories, biographies written by men who were close to Jesus, sent by him, and passionate servants of the church. **Paul's great passion was the church.** Jesus has saved him from his blasphemous past, appointed him as the apostle to the nations. All of his ministry he was fighting to plant the gospel deeply into the lives of people, and often that meant fending off different threats to the church.

As Paul writes to Timothy, he's knows the challenges that are coming after him. It won't be long until the great apostle passes from the scene and new leadership is required.

His concern, to be a bit anachronistic, is that the church would pull a Harvard. That it would abandon its founding principles, that it would slip slowly into error, ineffectiveness, and eventually apostasy.

We know this was on Paul's mind. In **Acts 20** when Paul is speaking with the Ephesians elders, he knows after he departs "*fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things.*" This was years before writing to Timothy, but Paul apparently saw it coming. And now, he's writing to Timothy who served in Ephesus (1:3- "*remain at Ephesus*"). Paul saw the storm clouds on the horizon, but occupied in his own ministry, he had Timothy stay in Ephesus to take on the threats.

We know the same threats that faced Timothy face us, wearing different masks. We are, this morning, and this year, and this decade, always in danger of decline by degrees. We are always

one generation from apostasy. Our desire is long-term, rooted faithfulness. And so we want to read this book with our eyes wide open.

So the text we come to this morning is the introduction, the greeting. Let's read it. *"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."*

We're going to make three observations about this text: **First**, this letter comes to strengthen a true child in the faith. **Second**, this letter comes with divine authority. **Third**, this letter comes with saving intent

### **Our first observation is that this letter comes to a true child in the faith.**

Timothy is called Paul's *"true child"* in the faith. Timothy is Paul's child in the sense that Paul led him to the Lord, spiritually parented him, raising him in the truth. There are a lot of people who were converted under Paul's ministry, but it seems that none were so close as Timothy.

He was a spiritual child not only in the sense that he was converted under Paul's ministry, but in the sense that he followed his life. Timothy had Paul's spiritual likeness. There are some commentaries that say Timothy must have been a kind of shy, weak young man because Paul had to write him a couple letters and at one point he tells him not to let people look down on him. But I don't see it. He was a young man, but when you survey his life as recorded in the New Testament you get a much different picture-- he was Paul's replica.

His name is littered all through the New Testament. He probably got saved in **Acts 14**, when Paul passed through Lystra on his first missionary journey. We first meet him in **Acts 16** where he's described as a well-liked, well-respected young man that Paul wants to come along on his missionary journey. In **Acts 17**, Paul preaches in Thessalonica, incites the wrath of the Jews, takes off, and leaves Timothy to clean up the mess.

At one point he was sent to Corinth-- which, as you know-- was a church filled with division, aberrant theology, gross immorality. Paul sent Timothy there. In **1 Cor. 4:16-17** Paul says, *"I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church."* Paul wanted the Corinthians to imitate him, so he sent Timothy to them. Timothy was such a replica of Paul's own character that to imitate him was to imitate Paul.

Paul had Timothy ready to head out to Philippi too. **Philippians 2:19-24** is perhaps the most glowing sections about Timothy. *"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he served with me in the gospel. I*

*hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.”*

*He’s trustworthy.* Paul can send him anywhere and know Timothy will bless the church.

*He’s genuine.* Wherever he goes, he’s going to be “genuinely concerned” for the good of the people he’s with. You won’t have to coerce him or bribe him. That’s his character.

*He’s Christ-motivated.* There’s an inner-compulsion, driven by the interests of Jesus Christ. He’s not in it for money, for popularity, for fame, for comfort. He genuinely loves Jesus.

*He’s loyal.* Their ministry was like father and son.

Timothy was a “true child.” Trustworthy, genuine, motivated by the love of Christ, loyal. We could always use more of those kinds of people, right?

I’ve had some friends at Compass Bible Church in Aliso Viejo, and they’ve been using this phrase ATAPAT to describe their commitment. A.T.A.P.A.T. “Any thing, any place, any time.” That’s Timothy in a nutshell. Jesus, I’ll do anything, any place, any time.

That’s what we want to be. And that’s the person this letter is written to. Frankly, this letter will be more rewarding the more you’re an “any thing, any place, any time” kind of person. It addresses concerns that matter to church-lovers, committed to laboring for the health and effectiveness of Christ’s church.

Timothy’s traits ought to be growing traits in all of us. In fact, this brings us back to the beginning. Unless we are Timothys-- trustworthy followers of Paul’s example, genuinely concerned people, motivated not by popularity but by Christ, loyal to one another and to the cause-- our church will follow Harvard away from its purpose toward apostasy.

That’s why we’re here. We are the church. We are to be the lighthouse amidst the storm of worldliness. We are the beachhead for the advancing kingdom. We are here to preserve, protect, and proclaim the most precious reality in the universe. John Calvin writes of our role here: *“Is anything more venerable, or more holy, than that of everlasting truth which embraces both the glory of God and the salvation of men?...What a weight, therefore, rests on the pastors, who have been entrusted with the charge of so inestimable a treasure!” “How dreadful is the vengeance that awaits them, if, through their fault, that truth which is the image of the Divine glory, the light of the world, and the salvation of men, shall be allowed to fall!”*

**The 2nd observation is that this letter comes to us, this morning, with divine authority.**

**Vs. 1:** *“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope.”*

We’ve already spent an entire Sunday looking at Paul. We know of his former life as a well-taught, highly educated, extremely zealous, irresistible leader of those who wanted to

obliterate Christianity from the scene. His conversion was a sovereign act of God's grace-- not only saving grace but transforming grace. As a part of that salvation was a sending, his conversion came with a commission.

Remember back in **Acts 9**, after Paul was converted, God appeared to Ananias and basically gave him instructions on how to go take care of Paul. And God said to him, "*Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.*" The Lord saved him and appointed him to a unique role to bring the gospel to the nations. He was made an apostle by Jesus Christ.

He wasn't sent by a church, as others were. He was sent by Jesus himself. And he wants to remind Timothy of that. Paul is a "sent one"-- that's what apostle means-- of Jesus Christ.

He was sent by "*command of God our savior and of Christ Jesus our hope.*" Think about it: God the Father, in coordination with God the Son, commanded a man to bring a message to Timothy. This is not a piece of mail to ignore. This is why this letter was preserved and passed down to us today. Paul was a soldier under orders, commissioned to communicate divine truth to the world, and here he makes it clear that these words carry **eternal weight**.

God does not need to rip open the eyes to speak to us. God does not need to come to us in ecstatic visions and dreams. God the Father, and God the Son (Christ Jesus), commanded Paul to serve as an apostle to the nations, and God the Spirit inspired him to write this letter.

Jesus promised this In **John 16:12-13** Jesus said to his apostles, "*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak.*" **John 14:26** "*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*" Paul, one of the apostles, would be the instrument of Christ's continued giving of divine revelation.

Friends, we can read this letter as if it's from Paul, and we would be right in doing so. But let us not forget that this letter is of divine origin. It is God's message, given through Jesus Christ, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore endowed with the very same power that created the universe.

We're always encountering claims of authority. Watch any show, listen to any program, read any book, and you'll encounter someone claiming to be an authority you should listen to. And there are a lot of authorities that are not helpful. But this is divine authority. God's authority.

So as we reflect on how to "live in the household of God, the church" (3:14-15), we must come to grips with this fundamental reality: God is speaking to us here. He has much to say about our lives together as Christians. This letter cuts through the opinions of man like a hot knife through butter. This introduction trumpets the arrival of a letter from the King of All.

Do you see why we do expositional preaching? The point of a expositional sermon is to discover the meaning of the text of Scripture, explain and apply it. Repeat. All through a book until we finish and then we move on to another one. This is what we need. I don't think any other way of preaching, as a regular diet for a congregation, will produce health like expositional preaching will.

**Our third observation is this: the letter comes with saving intent.**

Look again at **verse one**. Paul says he's an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of, and he lists two members of the Godhead. But to see what he's doing here, we have to notice how he does this. He doesn't just say, "by command of God and Jesus." He says "*by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope.*"

Paul moves away from his own credentials as an apostle and toward the credentials of the sender. He wants Timothy to remember that the God who sent him is *a Savior*, and the Christ who sent him is *our hope*.

The title "*God our Savior*" only appears in the pastoral epistles (1-2 Timothy, Titus). Perhaps Paul is saying this because of the notion that God is a wrathful, vengeful God and Jesus is the gentle, loving one who placates him and somewhat replaces him. But the Old Testament is riddled with this idea, that God saves.

- **Isaiah 12:2** "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation."
- **Isaiah 43:3** For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
- **Isaiah 43:11** "I, I am the Lord, besides me there is no savior."

God didn't want to damn everyone while Jesus came along to save everyone. God has always been a savior, he sent Jesus Christ into the world is an expression of his love.

Then look at "*Christ Jesus our hope.*" Christ in Greek is *Christos*, it means Messiah, and it refers to his kingly, divine, majestic nature. Messiah Jesus, Promises-fulfilling Jesus, King Jesus. This Jesus is our hope.

Put these two titles together and we're getting a picture of our God. God our Savior, Christ our hope. Here we see combined omnipotence "God" with indescribably love: "Savior." We see majestic power: "Christ" combined with immeasurable kindness: "our hope." We have transcendent-- God and Christ, combined with his amazing condescension to come and save sinners: Savior, our hope.

Your words are an extension of who you are. Isn't that right? Your words always come from deep within you, and they are an expression of your character. The same is true for God. When God speaks, it is an expression of his character. So when Paul highlights the character of God,

he is reminding him of the power of the words. When God our salvation speaks, when Christ our hope speaks, he speaks words of salvation and hope. This letter, being divinely inspired by a Savior God, comes with saving intent.

The purpose of this letter is to teach us how to preserve saving truth. What a grace from God.

Paul is highlighting the saving work of God. **verse 2**: his salutation: “*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ our Lord.*” When God our Savior commands a letter to be written, his very words convey “*Grace, mercy, and peace*” to us. Even his greeting he wants to be saturated with the love, grace, and mercy of God.

**Grace?** Grace is the undeserved favor of God toward the guilty sinner, removing the guilt of his past sins and relieving him of his deserved punishment. **What is mercy?** Mercy is the “self-moved” spontaneous compassion of God for the miserable sinner, freeing the sinner from the consequences of his sin. **And peace?** peace is the result of have God’s grace and mercy poured out toward you. It speaks of the harmony which results from the removal of the discord which sin has produced.

I got a letter last week. At the top of the letter, “2018 Annual Secured Property Tax Bill.” Wasn’t really excited to open it and discover its message for me.

Paul wants Timothy to remember the character of the God who sent him. God our Savior, Christ our Hope.

For a moment, let’s camp on that phrase, “*Christ Jesus our hope.*”

What is your hope? No really. You’re betting your eternal soul on something. What is it? You come to church, is that your hope? You’ve done good things, is that your hope?

If you’re not a Christian, I want to be clear about what Christianity is. Our hope is not that obeying the Bible will make us right with God. Our hope is not in our system, or in our theology. Our hope is not ourselves. Where is our hope? Not in our good works, they’re filthy. Not in our performance, we’ve failed. Not in our innocence, we have none.

Even you, non-Christian, know that if God were to evaluate you, you would stand before him guilty. You know that. And the Christian message is that you can’t do anything about that. But Christ Jesus is our hope. He died and rose again to pay the penalty for your sin, and by faith in him you can be completely forgiven. Jesus Christ is your only hope.

We, like impoverished beggars, are holding on to Jesus Christ, trusting his unbreakable promise, that he will save all who come to him. This is the God we worship.

**John Newton:** *“O what a mercy to see all power in heaven and earth exercised by Him who was nailed to the cross for sinners.”* Christ willingly became your substitute. To die in your place, for your sins, to pay for your guilt in full, to rise again victorious have satisfied the wrath of God you deserved, to extend free forgiveness for you. He has all authority-- he will save those who come to him by faith.

So Paul wants to set this thought before Timothy. This is because the minister of the gospel must always be setting the gospel before his people. 1 time his own name, 1 time Timothy's name, 2 times God the Father's name, Christ Jesus 3 times!

**Thomas Burroughs** says *“It should be the work of ministers to set Jesus Christ before the hearts of people, before their eyes continually...”* This is what Paul is doing by saying Christ our hope. He goes on to say, *“Labor to set Jesus Christ before your eyes; look upon him as the great wonder of the world, and never leave meditating until you find your heart come to admire at the glory of God in Christ. If ever your hearts are taken with admiring anything in the world, let them be taken up with the admiration of Jesus Christ.”*

I get a lot of phone calls that I don't want to pick up. When I can't identify the number, I'm almost certain I don't want to talk to that person. But when a letter is commissioned and inspired by someone who is not only powerful but generous, not only great but humble, not only rich but willing to help-- I want to listen, because I know good things are going to happen. Here, Paul's greeting is a that we would experience Grace, Mercy, and Peace.

Do you have high expectations from God's Word? This means that we should have high expectations on Sundays as we gather to listen. His grace will strengthen us. His mercy will give us joy. His peace will reign in our hearts.

It also means that this very morning, God is speaking to you. He's telling you, yet again or maybe for the first time, good news. The good news is that God is a savior, that Christ Jesus is the hope of the world. The good news is that his grace is available, that he is merciful to humble sinners, and that when you repent and believe, trusting in Christ alone, you can be at peace with God.

This letter is the very word of God, delivered through the apostle Paul. It is the message of a God who saves, of a Christ who holds himself out as the only hope of the world. It is a letter to strengthen a true child in the faith, Timothy, but by extension becomes a deep well from which we draw grace, mercy, and peace from God.

It is a letter that is God's design to strengthen and preserve his church.