

November 29, 2020

## “Christmas Can Make You Thankful” 1 Timothy 1:15

FCF: Our struggle with gratitude

**PROPOSITION:** (magnet) There is a wonder to the Christmas message.  
(anchor) And it can make you thankful.

### SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

“What are you thankful for?” - a question that can yield a good deal of spiritual fruit. But it can be a struggle to answer at times. The challenges of 2020 can present some obvious barriers to gratitude. But, if we’re honest, those barriers to gratitude and obstacles to thankfulness were there long before now. The problem is far deeper and far more stubborn than we may realize.

This is the first Sunday of Advent, the season taking us up to Christmas. There’s good news. This season and the coming of Christmas can be a welcome challenge to a thankless heart.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [1 Timothy 1:12-17](#)

### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

### SERMON INTRODUCTION:

A Ghanaian proverb ([READ](#)), “Even the chicken, when it drinks, lifts its head to heaven to thank God for the water.” The idea is that most birds drink by gravity. They will dip their beak in the water, take a sip, then lift their heads in the air until the water dribbles down their throat.

We should follow their lead, all the more as we consider the health benefits of gratitude. Studies have shown that gratitude lowers blood pressure, improves immune function, and encourages better sleep. Clearly, we are hard-wired to be grateful, individually and collectively. Groups, teams, and families function better the more gratitude is mutually expressed. We know this. It’s why it’s good to train our children to say “Thank you” with every gift they receive.

But we need more than training. We need an example, a model. We see this with Paul in our text. His is a heart of overflowing gratitude. That said, we need more than an example. This simply doesn’t come naturally to us. We need the ability. Why was Paul so thankful? ([READ 1 Timothy 1:15](#)) When we look at what he says, we see it has to do with Advent and the message of Christmas. There is a wonder to the Christmas message. And it can make you thankful.

What about this can make us thankful? Four things. First, the content of Christmas. Then, the offer of Christmas. Third, the essence of Christmas. Fourth, the impact of Christmas.

### I. THE CONTENT OF CHRISTMAS

([READ 1 Timothy 1:15a](#)) Paul is saying, “This is real and decisive. You can count on it.”

#### A) *True*

##### 1. Unlike false teaching

Paul had sent Timothy to Ephesus to deal with deviant doctrine that showed itself in speculation, arrogance, and greed. “Unlike the false teaching around you, Timothy, this is true and good.”

##### 2. Faithful to the gospel

Unlike these reprobate rivals, this message is true and faithful to the gospel, to the good news.

*B) Reliable*

1. Substantive

And because it is true, it is reliable. It's substantive; it has a good effect. Look with me at Psalm 19 and vv.7-8. Because of the first clause, it leads to the second clause (**PARA Psalm 19:7-8**).

2. Bankable

Paul is saying that this saying, this word, is reliable. It is substantive and bankable. We can give more than just intellectual assent to this. It's worth acting on, trusting in, and even living by.

The content of the Christmas message is true and reliable.

*Application:*

Consider the number and content of the competing messages in the marketplace of ideas. The gospel stands out like a lighthouse on a dark stormy night, in utter contrast to what John Stott rightly called (**READ**) "the speculative nonsense of false teachers and outright lies of secular propaganda." Oh how we need such a lighthouse, something that is actually really true.

There is a wonder to the Christmas message and its content. It can make you thankful.

**II. THE OFFER OF CHRISTMAS**

(**READ 1 Timothy 1:15a**) This offer is to be accepted. How far? To what extent?

*A) Complete*

1. Not slightly

Completely. Not slightly - not downplayed, discounted, or minimized under any circumstances.

2. But fully

Not slightly but fully - embraced, endorsed, and received no matter the cost or consequences.

*B) Universal*

This saying, this word, is worthy of full acceptance. Some scholars say it goes past even that - full not just in terms of depth but breadth. That is, it's worthy of full acceptance by all.

1. Not for just a few

That is, this message is not just for a few. It's not just one good idea or solution among many.

2. But for all

It's for all, worth full acceptance and acceptance by all. It's the one solution and cure we have.

Listen to Paul's words. The offer of the Christmas message is complete and universal.

*Application:*

Many say all religions are just the same. You can understand the motivation. The idea is to counteract any triumphalism or strife and violence. But the idea won't hold. It doesn't square with the basic beliefs of the different faiths. And, as tolerant as it may sound, it's actually dismissive and disrespectful. Surely Jesus' teachings don't allow this. He simply won't allow it.

Which forces us to make some choices, hard as they may be to make, to grow up, press past our spiritual immaturity and make some decisions. Which is good. We need to be pressed.

There is a wonder to the Christmas message and its offer. And it can make you thankful.

### **III. THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTMAS**

Which takes us from the content and offer of Christmas to its essence (**READ 1 Timothy 1:15**). What is it that happened? And why? “Can someone tell me what Christmas is all about?”

#### *A) Historical*

##### 1. Jesus’ entrance

Let’s start with this. Paul is speaking of an historical event taking place in time and space. This is not the stuff of legend or myth but the fulfillment of ancient prophecy and human longing.

##### 2. Jesus’ pre-existence

Jesus “came into the world.” But that implies His pre-existence. If I say, “Sam came into the room,” I mean, “Sam was there but now he’s here.” This can be said of no other birth or arrival.

#### *B) Liberating*

It’s an extraordinary statement. But Paul also speaks to Jesus’ mission, to why He came.

##### 1. Meaning of the word

“Christ Jesus came to save sinners.” He came to save - to restore to health, to deliver, to rescue.

##### 2. Implications for us

Think of the implications for us. This is why Jesus came, where He found us when He came, where we’d be without Him and His coming into the world, where we’d be without Christmas.

Do you hear what Paul is saying? The essence of Christmas is historical and liberating.

#### *Application:*

This is the fact of Christmas and its purpose. Think with me here. “Jesus saves” can be repeated so often that it can become trivialized and trite. It can be easily parodied by foolish scoffers. And easily forgotten by forgetful disciples. But Jesus really does save. We know this.

So perhaps it needs to be repeated. Perhaps there really is something in that statement we need to hear. Perhaps there’s something there that, if forgotten, causes us to lose our bearings.

There is a wonder to the Christmas message and its essence. It can make you thankful.

### **IV. THE IMPACT OF CHRISTMAS**

Which brings us to this last point (**READ 1 Timothy 1:15**). After the content, the offer, and the essence of the Christmas message, we finally come to its impact, its effect upon us.

#### *A) Personal*

For starters, Paul makes it clear this not abstractly theoretical. It is deeply personal.

##### 1. Not a literal assessment

He says he is the foremost of sinners - the chief, greatest, and very worst of all. Obviously, that’s not a literal assessment. It’s not as though Paul had sifted through all the criminal records of the world databases, made the comparisons, and come to the sad conclusion he’d won the prize.

##### 2. But a spiritual conviction

This is not a literal assessment but a spiritual conviction. It's evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in his life such that he'd given up on all comparisons. Ironically, that's what it really means. He's given up on all that as a stupid pointless game. Which frees and impels him to say this.

*B) Doxological*

But this personal reflection moves into a doxological expression, to praise of the Lord.

1. The grace of God

Paul's heart has been captured by the grace of God. He knew his past. He knew what he'd been - a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. The story is recounted several times in Acts. What had happened to change this trajectory? Twice, Paul says, literally, "But I was mercied."

2. A heart of praise

"I was mercied." His heart was captured by the grace of God. Which gave him a heart of praise ([READ 1 Timothy 1:16-17](#)). All his boasting about himself shifted to a boasting in the Lord.

The impact of Christmas is personal. And then becomes deeply doxological.

*Application:*

How could it not be? Yes, our story is different - each of us from one another and from the Apostle Paul. But, if we are disciples of Jesus - having heard his call, repented, believed, and now numbered as His followers - we can truly read ourselves into this ([READ 1 Timothy 1:15](#)). We truly can read ourselves into this and we deeply need to everyday in every time and season.

There is a wonder to the Christmas message and its impact. It can make you thankful.

**CONCLUSION:**

The message of Christmas really can change you. Think of Charles Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol*. Think of the ways Scrooge is described to the reader early on ([READ](#)):

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grind-stone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dogdays; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

And think how that is borne out in his behavior - his refusal to give to charity, his rejection of the kindness of his nephew, and his slavish oversight of poor Bob Cratchit. But then, of course, Scrooge is visited one night by the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future. And Dickens clearly means for the reader to see something of a conversion here. Scrooge is reborn ([READ](#)):

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows, and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk that anything could give him so much happiness.

We see the fruit of that borne out in his generosity to charity, his repentance towards his nephew, and his kindness to Bob and the whole Cratchit family. The story was written in 1843 and has never been out of print. There have been who knows how many movies and TV adaptations (of varying quality). There's something about this tale that resonates. Yes, we like to hear that even the worst can change for the better. And there's something to that. But there's more. Far more.

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