

“Christ Jesus Came to Save Sinners”

1 Timothy 1:15

Words to Wait By, 1

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First Sunday of Advent



Opening Prayer

Father in heaven,
to Whom a day is as a thousand years,
and a thousands years is as a day:

Forgive our impudence and impatience in trusting too much
in the unworthy and unreliable wisdom of this world.

Help us to wait by Your trustworthy words,
that we may be ready at the appearing of your Son,
our Savior, Redeemer, Deliverer, and King.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I. Words That Lose Their Worth

Perhaps now more than ever, we are in need of trustworthy and faithful words. We live in very uncertain times. And the words of leader and neighbor are unreliable. Nobody seems to mean what they say anymore.

I believe that words are sacred and that Christians should choose them carefully. There is a time and place for every word. To use words out of their time or place is to profane them. (Yes, this is a bigger view than simply labeling certain words as "cuss" words.)

Words lose their worth when they no longer mean what they mean.

So this week, I looked up some words and phrases common in the social media culture to show you what I mean.

- *Dead* = to laugh out loud. "That is so funny. I'm dead."
- *Main Character* = being the center of one's own life. "Got my hair done—who's the main character now?"
- *GOAT* = greatest of all time.
- *Tea* = news and gossip. "Did you hear?" "No! Spill the tea!"
- *Woke* = attentive to important issues—esp. injustice and racism
- *Beat* = to apply or describe makeup.
- *Cheugy* = (chew-gee) uncool, out of date, old trends.

I don't share these to condemn the use of these words (for language changes). Rather, to show that in the world, words change and do not have the stability the trustworthiness of the words of Christ. For Christ means what He says.

Matthew 24:35

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

II. Trustworthy Words to Wait By

Tonight is the first week of Advent. It is the first day of the Christian calendar. We begin in a season of expectation, of longing, and of waiting. We anticipate the coming of Christ—both in His birth and in His return. And we open our hearts to Him now in preparation.

So tonight, we open a series called "Words to Wait By." Because we need to wait for the coming of our Savior with wise, trustworthy words we can bet our life on.

Five times in the "Pastoral Letters" (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus), Paul uses the phrase: "The saying is trustworthy" and twice adds, "and deserving of full acceptance."

1. 1 Timothy 1:15
2. 1 Timothy 3:1
3. 1 Timothy 4:9
4. 2 Timothy 2:11
5. Titus 3:8

The phrase is similar to Jesus' "Truly, truly, I say to you" or to our "You can take this to the bank" or, "You can bet your life on it."

These words are trustworthy because they mean what they mean. And they will always mean what they mean. Because Christ doesn't change.

The phrase "the saying is trustworthy" is three simple words in Greek:

pistos hos logos = "faithful is the Word" (trustworthy, reliable)

The Word spoke creation into being.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The Word is faithful and true. And we can bet our lives on Him.

III. We Worship While We Wait

1. The Pastoral Letters: The Church is about Christ

The Pastoral Letters are written by Paul to his “sons” in the faith: Timothy and Titus. He has left both with specific churches order to correct some imbalances. Primarily, he instructs them as pastors and charges them to correct false teachings.

What is eye-opening about Paul’s pastoral instruction is that he offers no advice for how to grow the church’s attendance or provide more entertainment for the weary and bored worshippers. **Rather, all thirteen chapters contain at least one explicit reference to Christ.**

- To Paul, **Christology is more important than methodology.**
- We become the true church, the body of Christ on earth, when we exalt and worship Christ
- Any church that fails to do this is not a true church in the biblical sense.

Worship is our primary act in awaiting Christ.

2. The First Trustworthy Saying: Our Lives are About Christ

Our first trustworthy saying is 1 Timothy 1:15. Charles Spurgeon called it, "The gospel in one verse." Our trustworthy saying appears as the central concept in a paragraph (1:12-17):

1. Paul's personal testimony and thanksgiving (12-14)
2. The gospel in a single verse (15)
3. Paul's mission as a result of his conversion (16)
4. A doxology praising God (17)¹

This is how the Christian worships while awaiting Christ:

1. We are thankful: giving thanks to Christ for our salvation
2. We are theological: orienting our lives around the coming of Christ
3. We are missional: bringing others to Christ through the mercy we receive
4. We are doxological: praising God for His glory and goodness.

IV. Christ Jesus Came Into the World

This is what Christmas is about: Christ Jesus came into the world. Let's examine this trustworthy saying in three questions:

¹ Gordon Fee points out that the church likely borrowed this doxology from the synagogues. It appears in Paul's letter as a quotation from something already in existence rather than as something Paul penned himself.

1. Who Came Into the World: Christ Jesus.

"Christ" is the Greek form of the Hebrew word "Messiah." Both mean "anointed" and was used frequently in the Old Testament to refer to those whom God has chosen to accomplish His purposes on earth. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Father's instrument to accomplish His purpose on earth, anointed by the Holy Spirit. Gabriel told Mary:

Luke 1:35

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you... therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God."

Matthew 1:18

She was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

"Jesus" means "savior" and is the earthly name given to Him by the angel in Joseph's dream:

Matthew 1:21

"[Mary] will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

2. How Christ Jesus Came Into the World

- *Voluntarily.* He was not forced or coerced. He came of His own will.
- *From heaven.* He came from beyond this world. This implies His divinity.

- *Fully human; fully divine.* He didn't just appear; he came. That is, He became what we are. While remaining fully God, He became fully human.² And this matters, because:

St. Gregory of Nyssa (4th c.)

What has not been assumed has not been healed;

it is what is united to His divinity that is saved.

3. Why Christ Jesus Came Into the World: To Save Sinners

Christ came to save sinners, *not condemn them*:

John 3:17

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Christ came to save sinners, *not help them save themselves*.

What did He save sinners from?

- *From sin, not from God.* While this may sound obvious, it is a very important point. Many live as if God is angry at us and believe that Jesus came to reconcile God to us. But it is the opposite that is true! Jesus came to reconcile us to God!

² Naturally, this warrants its own message. See my 2020 Christmas message "Waiting With Mary."

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Colossians 1:19-20

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

- *From condemnation and for liberation.* Yes, Jesus pardons us from the condemnation of our past sin. But often overlooked is that He also empowers us to conquer our present and future sins. Sin isn't dreaded because of punishment, but because of its entanglement—it mires us in the world and prevents us from being united in the life of Christ.

V. Overflowing Grace for Overwhelmed Sinners

In a very memorable phrase, Paul adds the trustworthy saying: "Of whom I am the foremost." (Or more memorable is the KJV: "Of whom I am chief.")

Paul does not say this because he has conducted a thorough examination of every sinner and concluded he is the worst. Rather, he says this because he has seen his own sin in the light of God's mercy and grace. **Everyone who takes**

an honest look at their sin comes to the same conclusion: I am the chief of sinners.

We do not, in other words, need to sin more to become bigger sinners; we have plenty of darkness in our own hearts. **We will never outgrow the label "sinner." And as soon as we do, we outgrow God.** In his sermon on 1 Timothy 1:15, Charles Spurgeon relates an experiment he conducted:

Charles Spurgeon

I [once] went to God in prayer boasting about my virtues, and my attainments, and my growth in grace and my service for Him. I showed that I have as good a right to do that as anybody else has. I have served God with all my might, and I have laid everything at His feet. But when I tried to pray that way, I knocked at the gate, and nobody came. I knocked again, but nobody came. There is a little wicket, you know, that they open, just to look out to see who is there. So they asked, "Who is that knocking?" I answered, "Oh, it is a saint! It is one who has grown in grace until he is perfectly sanctified, one who has preached the gospel for many year." They just shut the gate at once; they did not know anything about me in that capacity; so I stood there, and got nothing.

At last, broken-hearted and full of grief, I knocked again with all my might, and when they asked, "Who is there?" I said, "Here is a poor sinner, who has often come to Christ in that capacity, and has taken Him to be his whole righteousness and salvation, and he has come again just as he used to come." "Ah!" they said, "it is you, is it? We have known you for many years; you are always welcome." I found that I had access to my God when I said, "I am the chief of sinners. I am a sinner still."

Acknowledging our status as “sinner” puts us in the right company. For Jesus is the friend of sinners.

Matthew 9:11-13

And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when [Jesus] heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

It seems the more we battle our sin, the more aware of its presence we become. Here is an irony: **the closer we get to Christ, the clearer our title “sinner” becomes.**

The greater the sinner, the greater the saint. Because Christ Jesus came.

To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.