WEEK 1 — HE CAME TO SAVE SINNERS

December 6 — Peace

Primary Text: 1 Timothy 1:12–17
Supporting Texts: Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10; Romans 5:1

MAIN POINT

Jesus did not come because good people needed a little help. He came because sinners needed to be rescued.

Christmas is the beginning of a rescue mission. Jesus entered our world to save sinners—and that means there is hope for every one of us.

INTRODUCTION

When people think about what they need most, the answers are usually connected to their immediate circumstances.

We may think:

I need this relationship fixed.
I need the diagnosis to change.
I need more money.
I need less stress.
I need my children to make better decisions.
I need another opportunity.
I need life to settle down.

Those needs can be very real. But Scripture identifies a deeper problem beneath every other problem humanity faces.

We are sinners separated from a holy God.

That is why the Christmas announcement was not, "A teacher has been born to you," or "A motivational speaker has been born to you."

The angel said:

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." — Luke 2:11

God sent a Savior because our deepest need was rescue.

OPENING DISCUSSION

When you were a child, what part of Christmas did you look forward to most?

As an adult, what tends to occupy the most attention or energy during the Christmas season?

Why can it be easy to celebrate Jesus' birth without thinking very much about **why** He came?

UNDERSTANDING

READ 1 TIMOTHY 1:12–17

Paul is writing to Timothy, his younger ministry partner. But before Paul talks about Timothy's ministry, he pauses to remember what Jesus has done for him.

Paul never seems to get over the grace of God.

That matters because Paul's past was not clean.

Before following Jesus, Paul violently opposed Christians. He participated in their persecution and tried to destroy the church. Yet Jesus pursued him, saved him, transformed him, and eventually entrusted him with taking the gospel throughout the Roman world.

Paul uses his own story to show us what Christmas means.

1. JESUS CAME ON A MISSION

Verse 15:
"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners…"

Notice Paul's language.

Jesus **"came into the world."**

Bethlehem was not the beginning of Jesus.

The eternal Son of God existed before His birth. Christmas is the moment when the Son entered the world He had created and took on human flesh.

Christmas therefore was more than a miraculous birth.

It was a mission.

Jesus knew why He had come.

Matthew records the angel telling Joseph:

"You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." — Matthew 1:21

Jesus later described His own mission:

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." — Luke 19:10

Jesus did not accidentally find Himself on a cross thirty-three years after Bethlehem. The manger and the cross belong to the same rescue mission.

DISCUSSION

When you hear the phrase **"Jesus came on a rescue mission,"** how does that change the way you think about Christmas?

Why is it important to remember that Jesus existed before Bethlehem?

What happens to Christianity if Jesus becomes primarily a teacher or example instead of our Savior?

2. JESUS CAME FOR SINNERS

Paul gives us one of the clearest summaries of the gospel in Scripture:

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

That statement contains both difficult news and wonderful news.

The difficult news is that every one of us belongs in the category Paul describes.

Sinners.

Sin is more than occasionally making poor choices. Sin is our rebellion against God and our desire to live independently from Him.

Scripture does not divide humanity into "good people" and "bad people."

It divides humanity into sinners who need a Savior and sinners who have received a Savior.

That means Christianity does not begin with:

"Try harder."

It begins with:

"You need to be rescued."

DISCUSSION

Why do people tend to compare themselves with other people rather than with God's holiness?

Which is easier for most people to admit: "I make mistakes" or "I am a sinner who needs a Savior"? Why?

How does recognizing our own need for grace affect the way we treat people whose failures are different from ours?

3. PAUL NEVER FORGOT WHAT GRACE HAD DONE

Paul describes himself in verse 13 as:

- a blasphemer,
- a persecutor,
- an insolent opponent.

Then in verse 15 he calls himself the **"foremost"** of sinners.

Paul is not celebrating his past.

He is celebrating the size of God's grace.

Paul knew who he had been apart from Christ.

That remembrance did not leave Paul trapped in shame. Instead, it produced humility, gratitude, and worship.

There is an important difference between **remembering what Christ rescued us from** and **living condemned by what Christ has already forgiven.**

The gospel allows us to tell the truth about our sin without allowing our sin to have the final word about who we are.

DISCUSSION

Why do you think Paul continued talking openly about his past even after years of faithfully following Jesus?

What is the difference between healthy remembrance of our past and unhealthy shame over our past?

How can remembering God's grace make us more gracious toward others?

4. PAUL BECAME A TROPHY OF GRACE

Read verse 16 again.

Paul says God showed him mercy so that Jesus could display His **"perfect patience"** through Paul's life.

In other words:

If Jesus could save Paul, Jesus could save anyone.

Paul's transformation became evidence of what Jesus could do in another person's life.

God did not merely forgive Paul's past.

He redeemed it.

The man who once tried to destroy the church became one of its greatest missionaries.

That does not mean every consequence of our past disappears when we follow Jesus. It means our past no longer has the authority to determine what God can do with our future.

Your story of grace can become someone else's reason for hope.

DISCUSSION

Who have you known whose changed life made the power of the gospel especially believable to you?

Are there parts of your story you assume God could never use?

How might God use something He has brought you through to encourage someone else?

APPLICATION

Paul's story gives us two important Christmas reminders.

NO ONE IS TOO FAR GONE

There may be someone in your life whom you have nearly stopped believing can change.

There may also be an area of your own life where you have quietly wondered:

Could Jesus really forgive this?

Paul would answer with his life:

Yes.

The gospel does not say that our sin is small.

It says our Savior is greater.

PEACE WITH GOD IS POSSIBLE

The Advent theme for this week is **peace**.

Biblical peace begins somewhere deeper than peaceful circumstances.

Romans 5:1 says:

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Jesus came to deal with the separation between sinful humanity and a holy God.

Because Christ saves sinners, we can have peace **with God**, even when everything around us does not feel peaceful.

PERSONAL DISCUSSION

Where do you most need the peace of Christ right now?

Is there a person you have subconsciously decided is "too far gone"? What would it look like to begin praying differently for that person?

Which is harder for you personally: admitting your need for grace or believing that God's grace really covers your past?

Complete this sentence:

"One thing Jesus has rescued me from—or is rescuing me from—is…"

Leaders: Do not pressure anyone to disclose something deeply personal. Give people permission to share at the level they are comfortable.

PRAYER

Invite the group to thank God specifically for His mercy.

Pray for:

- people who feel disqualified by their past,
- friends or family members who do not yet know Christ,
- people struggling to believe they can truly be forgiven,
- opportunities during Christmas to share the hope of Jesus.

End by thanking Jesus that He **came into the world to save sinners.**

BETWEEN-WEEK PRACTICE

REMEMBER YOUR RESCUE

Sometime this week, take ten minutes and write a simple version of your story:

Before Christ: What did you need Him to rescue you from?

Meeting Christ: How did you come to understand and receive the gospel?

Since Christ: What difference is Jesus making in your life?

Your story does not need to be dramatic to be powerful.

Grace is always worth celebrating.

Also identify **one person** who needs the hope of Christ and pray for that person by name each day this week.

COMMENTARY

1 Timothy 1:15 — “Christ Jesus came into the world”

The language points beyond Jesus' birth to His preexistence. The Son did not begin to exist in Bethlehem. The eternal Son entered human history.

“To save sinners”

The verb *save* communicates rescue from danger. Scripture presents sin as something humanity cannot solve through self-improvement. Salvation requires divine intervention.

Paul as the “foremost”

Paul's point is not to establish a ranking system for sinners. He emphasizes the seriousness with which he viewed his own rebellion against Christ.

Verse 16 — “An example”

Paul understands his conversion as a demonstration of Christ's patience. His life becomes evidence that no sinner is beyond the reach of grace.

Doctrinal Guardrail

Avoid saying, “God loves you just the way you are,” if the statement stops there. God loves sinners deeply enough that Christ came to save and transform us. Grace meets us where we are, but grace does not leave us where we are.