

## Timely Rescue

1 of 4 in *Christmas Unwrapped*

Nov. 28, 2022

1 Tim. 2:1-7 (cf. 2 Tim. 1:9-10)

Today, we begin a new sermon series, and I'll be breaking today's message into two main parts.

In part one, I'll take some time to introduce the series and explain what it's all about. Then, in part two, I'll teach on the particular passage we'll be looking at today.

So first, a series introduction.

It's a fresh take on a Christmas series. Rather than teaching on more traditional Christmas texts, in the weeks to come we're going to explore some Advent-related themes in the Pastoral Epistles.

Does anyone know what the Pastoral Epistles are?

They are a collection of three short New Testament letters— 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus. Written by the apostle Paul, these letters for the most part share common themes and address a common set of issues.

We call them the Pastoral Epistles because these letters are addressed, respectively, to two pastors that Paul was mentoring. Timothy was pastoring a church in Ephesus, located in modern-day Turkey. And Titus was pastoring a church on the island of Crete, south of mainland Greece.

Why would we choose the Pastoral Epistles for a *Christmas* series? Well, there's actually a key theme throughout these letters that relates to Advent in a very significant way. That theme is "epiphany".

What's does epiphany mean?

In English, the word tends to be used to describe one of those "aha" moments when you suddenly come to a striking realization or discovery, as in: "Wow, Darth Vader is Luke's father? What an epiphany!"

But the New Testament's use of the word epiphany (*epiphaneia* in the original Greek) features most prominently in the Pastoral Epistles, and can be defined as follows:

**Epiphany (Greek = *epiphaneia*):** A visible manifestation of a hidden divinity, either in the form of personal appearance, or by some deed of power by which its presence is made known.

When did the invisible God make a visible, personal appearance in this world? *When Jesus was born into the world at Christmas.* And by what deeds of power did this God especially make his presence known? Through Jesus' earthly ministry, in particular *his cross and resurrection.*

Here's how Paul puts it in 2 Timothy:

For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. And **now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing [epiphany] of Christ Jesus, our Savior.** He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News.<sup>1</sup>

This passage refers to the *first* epiphany, when God appeared in Christ at Christmas, and throughout his earthly ministry from there.

Several other passages in the Pastoral Epistles speak of Christ's *second* epiphany, his future return to earth as Judge to set the whole world right once and for all. An example of this can be seen in Titus 2:13, where Paul instructs Titus to encourage his flock to:

... wait for the blessed hope—**the appearing [epiphany] of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ...**<sup>2</sup>

So what we see in the Pastoral Epistles are the very themes that churches focus on throughout the Advent season: We celebrate the first advent—the first *epiphany* or coming of God in Christ at Christmas. And we look forward to his second advent, his second *epiphany* when he comes again rule the earth.

The heart of epiphany is that God *makes himself known* to us—he *reveals* himself to us—through the flesh-and-blood person of Jesus Christ. As Paul says 1 Timothy:

Without question, this is the great mystery of our faith:

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 1:9-10 (NLT)

<sup>2</sup> Titus 2:13 (NIV)

Christ was **revealed in a human body**... <sup>3</sup>

That's exactly what we celebrate at Christmas.

Who is God? What's God like? What are his intentions, plans and purposes for the world and for you and me? And what does it all mean for how we live our lives each day?

The Pastoral Epistles have a lot to say about these things, because they are revealed to us through the epiphany of God in Jesus Christ— very much like a gift is revealed once you unwrap it.

Accordingly, the title of this series is *Unwrapping Christmas*.

In each of the four messages in the series—starting today— we'll be “unwrapping” a different aspect of God's epiphany in Christ according to the Pastoral Epistles.

With that series introduction in mind, we can now move into the second part of this message, where I'll be unpacking our main text for today, 1 Timothy 2:1-7. Please follow along as I read it:

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. For,

There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone.

This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time. And I have been chosen as a preacher and apostle to teach the Gentiles this message about faith and truth. I'm not exaggerating—just telling the truth. <sup>4</sup>

In the original Greek of this passage, Paul doesn't actually use the word epiphany, but he nevertheless speaks of how there's “one God and Mediator... the man Christ Jesus.” So essentially he's still speaking about epiphany—about how the invisible God has made himself visibly and tangibly known in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Timothy 3:16 (NLT)

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 2:1-7 (NLT)

In Christ, God has revealed—God has unveiled or “unwrapped” for us— his heart, his character, as well as his plans and his purposes for the world, and for us.

In the passage we just read, Paul “unwraps” the fact that Christ’s epiphany involved a *timely rescue*. In the time that remains, we’re going to consider what this timely rescue means, who it’s for, and how to pray in light of it.

## **1. GOD’S TIMELY RESCUE IN CHRIST: What it means.**

The heart of our passage can be found in verses 5-6, where Paul writes:

There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time.<sup>5</sup>

In these verses we see, first of all, that humanity needs a *mediator* to reconcile our broken relationship with God—a relationship that we had spurned. We wanted to go our own way, to call our own shots, to be our own god as it were, rather than follow the one true God. This is the very essence of sin, and the Bible says we’re all guilty of it.

And the one God and Mediator who can set humanity’s broken relationship to God right, says the text is “the man Christ Jesus.” At Christmas we celebrate the *incarnation*—how God personally came to earth, took on a human body, and in Christ became one of us to identify with us, to represent the entire human race before God.

Christ became our mediator at the highest cost to himself—the cost of his very life. The text says “he *gave* his life” to purchase our freedom from sin and death, meaning he did so willingly, voluntarily.

And the fact that he gave his life to purchase our freedom means that in our sin we were powerless to rescue ourselves.

Verse 4 of our passage says that God “wants everyone to be saved.” And that means *everyone needs saving*. If you have not yet unwrapped the gift of God’s salvation in Christ, you still need to be saved. You need the one and only God and Saviour to rescue you.

Because you can’t rescue yourself any more than that Thai boys’ soccer team could rescue themselves from the deep, dark recesses of the cave where they became trapped back in 2018. Do you remember watching the news footage of the rescue efforts? Or have you seen the movie *Thai Cave Rescue* on Netflix?

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Timothy 2:5-6 (NLT)

According to Wikipedia, the rescue effort required the deployment of as many as 10,000 people—divers, government representatives, police officers, soldiers. Huge amounts of equipment were used in the rescue, including police helicopters, ambulances, diving cylinders and pumps. More than a billion litres of water were pumped from those caves.

Humanity required an outside rescue from God, because we had been stuck in the dark “caves” of our sin, and the inevitable consequence of remaining stuck in our sin, says the Bible, is eternal death.

The Thai cave rescue required massive resources, but our rescue from sin required infinitely more. It required God becoming a human being in Christ, and sacrificing his life, to rescue us. And he did so willingly. This is the Gospel. It’s the best news ever.

As Pastor Tim Keller puts it:

We are so evil and sinful and flawed that Jesus had to die for us. We were so lost that nothing less than the death of the divine Son of God could save us. But we are so loved and valued that he was willing to die for us. The Lord of the universe loved us enough to do that! So the gospel humbles us into dust and at the very same time exalts us to the heavens. We are sinners but completely loved and accepted in Christ at the same time. ... He saw your heart to the bottom and loved you to the skies.

And according to our text:

This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time.<sup>6</sup>

When Jesus was born into this world, and lived and died for us, it happened at the decisive moment in history which God in his providence had fixed for the accomplishment of his saving purposes.

As Paul says in chapter 1 of his letter to Titus:

And now at just the right time he has revealed this message, which we announce to everyone.<sup>7</sup>

In Galatians, Paul also writes:

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Timothy 2:6 (NLT)

<sup>7</sup> Titus 1:3 (NLT)

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.<sup>8</sup>

And in Romans, Paul says:

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners.<sup>9</sup>

Not unlike the Thai cave rescue happened at just the right time—how much longer could those boys have survived? — God’s rescue of us in Christ was a timely rescue.

Have you accepted the timely rescue that God offers you in Jesus? If not, what’s stopping you from doing so today?

I’ll circle back to that question later in the message, but for now, if you have not yet said yes to the salvation God offers you in Jesus, consider what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians:

Indeed, the “right time” is now. Today is the day of salvation.<sup>10</sup>

So far, we’ve looked at what God’s timely rescue in Christ means. Now, let’s consider who it’s for.

## **2. GOD’S TIMELY RESCUE IN CHRIST: Who it’s for.**

The answer our text gives is crystal clear. It’s for *everyone*—people of every race, nation, colour and language.

We’ve already read that the man Christ Jesus is the one God and Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity, and as it says in verse 6 of our passage:

He gave his life to purchase freedom for *everyone*.<sup>11</sup>

And if we back up to verse 3, Paul reminds us that:

... God our Saviour... wants *everyone* to be saved and to understand the truth.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Galatians 4:4 (NLT)

<sup>9</sup> Romans 5:6 (NLT)

<sup>10</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:2 (NLT)

<sup>11</sup> 1 Timothy 2:6a (NLT)

<sup>12</sup> 1 Timothy 2:3 (NLT)

The fact that God wants everyone to be saved through Christ can be seen in Paul's own ministry, because in verse 7 Paul tells us:

And I have been chosen as a preacher and apostle to *teach the Gentiles* this message about faith and truth. I'm not exaggerating—just telling the truth.<sup>13</sup>

Paul was a Jew, as Jesus himself was a Jew. Indeed, Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. But his saving work wasn't only for Jews. It was also for Gentiles, or non-Jews. And God had given Paul the ministry of proclaiming the saving message of Jesus to the Gentiles—to all nations.

So again and again throughout our passage, we see that God's timely rescue in Christ is for *everyone*.

And if it's for everyone, guess what? You're part of everyone!

But here's where you may object. You may say, salvation is for everyone else but me. Because you don't know what I've done. I'm just too far gone for God to save me.

If that's you, listen to what Paul says earlier in 1 Timothy, keeping in mind that in his pre-Christian days, Paul persecuted Christians and even oversaw their executions!

This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.<sup>14</sup>

So even if you see yourself as the worst of sinners, as Paul did, God's salvation in Christ is still for you.

That said, the fact that God wants everyone to be saved doesn't mean that everyone will automatically be saved. Yes, Jesus died for all—including the worst of sinners— but that doesn't mean that everyone is saved by default. This is why Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:

...we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and **especially of those who believe.**<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> 2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT)

<sup>14</sup> 1 Timothy 1:15-16 (NLT)

<sup>15</sup> 1 Timothy 4:10 (NIV)

You see, God's gift of salvation in Christ is available to all people, but it must be *believed and received* in order to be effective.

When you get a Christmas gift, you can't enjoy or benefit from what's inside unless you accept the gift and unwrap it.

God's timely rescue in Christ is for everyone— provided they accept it and unwrap it. Have you accepted— have you unwrapped— God's gift of salvation in Jesus?

So far we've seen what God's timely rescue in Christ means, and who it's for. Now, let's consider how we're called to pray in light of it.

### **3. GOD'S TIMELY RESCUE IN CHRIST: How to pray in light of it.**

Bible scholar J.N.D. Kelly explains that:

The fact that Christ died for all, without distinction, makes it obligatory for Christians to pray for all without distinction.<sup>16</sup>

And that's exactly Paul's message when it comes to how the people of the church are to pray in light of God's timely rescue in Christ:

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.<sup>17</sup>

God wants all to be saved, so when the church prays for everyone, this is good, and pleases God! And in particular, Paul urges that the church should pray for "kings and all who are in authority"— leaders in government—whether in our local municipality, our provincial or federal governments, or leaders of different countries and political bodies around the world.

This is something that many Christians—including myself—often neglect today.

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<sup>16</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles: Black's New Testament Commentary*, p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Timothy 2:1-3 (NIV)



But Paul makes it clear that when we pray for those in authority, it opens the way for us as believers to freely, authentically and *winsomely* live out our faith before the eyes “outsiders”— those who do not yet believe.<sup>18</sup> This allows the gospel of Jesus to spread, and for more people “to be saved and to understand the truth,” as our text puts it.

So instead of just talking about praying for those in authority, we should probably actually do it, wouldn't you agree? At this time, I'd like to lead you in a short prayer for our government leaders here in Canada. Let's bow and pray together...

Heavenly Father,

Father, forgive us for how prone we are to forget the clear instruction of your Word to pray for those in authority. Today, Lord, we pray for your wisdom and strength to be upon our municipal, provincial and federal leaders.

Keep them mindful of the importance of being people of integrity. Help them to be upright, honest and sincere in all they do.

We ask that they be people of strong character with sound morality; people of principle. Keep them mindful of their influence, particularly upon our young people, so that future generations will be equipped to become effective, godly future leaders.

Fill them with your wisdom as they lead, influence, develop laws, and wrestle with the many challenges of governing well.

We pray that our leaders will lead with compassion and love, and be ever aware of their huge responsibility to the people and of their greater responsibility to God.

Dear God, we commit our political leaders to you. Give them the strength, vision, love and compassion they require to be effective and godly leaders for the sake of your kingdom, honour and glory.

And grant each of them a personal revelation of Jesus Christ, our great God and Saviour, in whose name we pray.

Amen.

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<sup>18</sup> See 1 Timothy 3:7 and 6:1

Prayer like this, says our text, “is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.”

In Luke’s account of the Christmas story, we read about how Jesus was born into a political climate where Caesar—the Roman Emperor—declared himself to be the “saviour” of the world. But our passage today reminds us, as Bible scholar N.T. Wright puts it, that:

There is only one Saviour and it isn’t Caesar, or anyone else, no matter how powerful they are... However surprising it may seem to us, praying for those in authority, even if they are pagan rulers, will become part of God’s plan to spread the gospel to all the world. When rulers are doing their job, even if they don’t acknowledge God themselves, they create the peace and social stability which [can help] make this salvation a wider reality.<sup>19</sup>

So we’ve seen Paul’s instructions for believers when it comes to how to pray in light of God’s timely rescue of us in Christ. We’re to pray for everyone, especially those in authority.

But if you’re listening and you’re not yet a believer, not yet a follower of Jesus Christ, let me ask once again a question I posed earlier in this message: What’s stopping you from accepting God’s gift of timely rescue in Christ? As we’ve seen, it’s a gift that’s for anyone and everyone, including you— even if you see yourself as the worst of sinners. But it’s a gift that doesn’t apply to you automatically. You have to accept it. You have to “unwrap” and open it, as it were.

And speaking of timeliness, I remind you of what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians:

Indeed, the “right time” is now. Today is the day of salvation.<sup>20</sup>

If you’ve never before said “yes” to God’s gift of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus, I’d like to give you the opportunity to do so right now. As I lead in the following prayer, simply make this prayer your own:

Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God  
That you left the glories of heaven  
Were born here on earth  
As one of us  
To give your life for us

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<sup>19</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters – 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:2 (NLT)

To rescue us from sin and death  
And restore our broken relationship with God.  
I acknowledge that I'm a sinner in need of a Saviour.  
I now give my life to you.  
I receive your forgiveness  
And ask you to take your rightful place in my life  
As my Saviour and King.  
With your help, I will follow you all my days.  
Help me to grow in my relationship with you each day.  
In Your Name I pray, King Jesus.  
Amen.

If that's the first time you've sincerely prayed such a prayer—a prayer to embrace Jesus as your own Saviour and King— then you've just received the best Christmas gift possible. You've received God's gift of Jesus into your heart and life. Today has become the day of salvation for you.

If that's the case with you, please feel free to reach out to us. In fact, I welcome you to contact me at the email address you see on the screen ([steve@cornerstonechurch.ca](mailto:steve@cornerstonechurch.ca)) and I'd be happy to help get you connected here at the church and to recommend some next steps and good resources to help you in your journey with Jesus.

## **COMMUNION**