

Commitment to our Sacred Trust

1 Timothy 1:12-20

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost.”

Introduction: Sacred trusts, something precious entrusted to a faithful individual who will guard and defend it with their lives, both living and dying for what is secured. We can get tastes of this type of commitment in business on sales teams, in sports teams, or a group putting on performances, or perhaps in a life and death situation like the military. But the reality is there are not too many experiences in our life that we'd view as something sacred, something that we see the responsibility to defend it and display it with our entire life.

One of these is entering into a family through marriage. When I married Erin, not only did I commit to love her and point her to Christ and play a role in her sanctification before giving her back to Christ one day, but I entered into an extended family, entrusted with loving and caring for a group of people that I was now permanently linked to. Over Christmas and New Years the Bakker's were able to spend nearly two weeks with our family in Ohio, particularly since we have been hit with some extensive medical issues that leave the future uncertain. We experienced what *family* experiences when placed in close proximity for an extended period of time: *laughter, tears, frustration, misunderstanding, delight, tiredness, hurt feelings, things not going according to plans, revelation of selfishness, joy, encouragement, deep conversations, silliness, happiness, tension, sorrow in leaving, and a full gambit of emotions.* In all of this, there was a deep commitment that no matter what, we would love each other, be there for each other, defend, care, and fight for each other without question or expectation of return. In all the chaos there is deep beauty when family is committed to this sacred trust.

The church has been given a sacred trust, a deposit to guard, something valuable to display. Paul said it multiple times and ways in his letters to Timothy: "***the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.***" (1 Tim. 1:11); "***By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.***" (2 Tim. 1:14). When we come to Christ Jesus as a redeemed follower, we are not merely part of a church family, we have been given a sacred trust to guard and display. Just like the commitment we keep to our earthly family, we are committed not only to each other but the purpose by which we have been called.

When Paul clarified for Timothy how the church needed to be **ordered and how they needed to conduct themselves** (1 Tim. 3:14-16), he gave one of the clearest calls to the gospel found in Scripture:

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

This is one of a handful of statements Paul made that would have been well known among the church, not signaling something new but something sacred and confirmed (see 1 Tim. 3:1, 4:9, 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 3:8). Note why this phrase is so powerful and remarkable for the church:

- **Shapes Purpose** - In the midst of explaining prayer, leadership roles, conduct, dealing with false teachers, interactions of older and younger, care for widows, purity, holiness, and a call to contentment the church cannot forget her purpose. We live out familial relationships in a loving, pure, and organized way knowing that something better is offered to the world in the gospel. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, to save sinners, the blind to see, the deaf to hear,

the stranger into relationship. This means that everything that we do must have this in mind, since worship and love in the church is not mutually exclusive from reaching the lost but is essential to do so.

- **Testimony Matters** - Paul did not speak about the gospel, church, or discipleship from a disconnected, academic, mental, arms length way. He taught truth, and out of how that truth radically changed his life. He would access his testimony in evangelism, worship, and everyday relationships since his relationship with Christ was most valuable.
- **Present Reality, not a past Experience** - Notice that Paul used himself as an example of the power of the gospel, that it can change the worst and most wretched of all sinners, from the prostitute to the self-righteous who visits her, from the addict to the one who hides their addiction in sanitized ways, from the one who hates or denies God to the one who plays Him in their own life, the gospel can save anyone. Paul does not reference his sin as a past reality, but who he is, "I am the foremost." This was not false humility or needless hyperbole, but how Paul viewed his life as an **example of the grace given to him by Christ**.

As we look to the New Year as a church, it's good to frame the past and future through the lens of God's grace in the gospel, not as an artificial or conjured up reality, but what has truly changed our life in Christ. Paul gave a personal testimony of God's grace and in doing so, demonstrated what is our commitment to the sacred trust we received.

Our Sacred Trust is Received in Salvation (12-14)

*I thank him who has **given me strength**, **Christ Jesus our Lord**, because he has judged me faithful, **appointing me** to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. **But I received mercy** because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and **the grace of our Lord** overflowed for me with the **faith and love** that are in **Christ Jesus**.*

- **Our life is a product of God's work for and in us**

Life of a servant - The reason Paul could give thanks for all things is he realized that all of his life was a product of God's grace. He knew who he was without Christ: the worst kind of sinner, a blasphemer, opponent, and rebel against Christ. It was not his skills, acumen, or ability that gave him strength to serve or minister (diakonos), but God **who gave him strength** and who **appointed him**. Even being "judged faithful" was not about Paul's faithfulness but rather Christ's mercy in his life (see 1 Corinthians 7:25 - 'as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy')

Life as a redeemed son/daughter - Paul was condemned because of his sin of unbelief and because he sinned out of a sinful heart and flesh. But he received **mercy** (God withholding judgment and justice) and **grace** (lovingly and freely giving what could not be earned) overflowing with faith and love that are found in Christ Jesus. What Paul knew is what we know today: we are products of grace and mercy through Jesus Christ where we are given the gift of faith, experiencing the love of Christ who died in our place. This was not a matter of Paul's goodness or ability to figure life out, it was the saving work of Jesus on his behalf.

- **What this means for our church -**

This is a place for those in need of grace - We need grace because we are all sinful and weak. We are in need of grace overflowing from God which allows us to be gracious with each other. There is no one here that is not utterly dependent on God for any and every good thing.

This is a place of the redeemed, not good - We are not good people who have it all figured out who wait for others to "get it". We are redeemed people who have experienced the love and faith in Jesus Christ. This is why we say the church is a place to be fully known and fully loved, since we no longer have to hide the fact that we are sinful but hopeful, seeking to glorify God in our lowly state through the power of Christ at work in us.

This place is not about us - Somehow we have adopted this idea that the church exists for us, that the programs and structures are for us, and we judge the effectiveness of the church on whether it meets our needs or not. That is NOT THE DESCRIPTION of the church given anywhere in Scripture but a culturally driven entity. We are saved by God, for God, to the glory of God. We are here to die to self and live for the purpose by which God has left us here.

Our Sacred Trust is Put on Display (15-16)

*The saying is trustworthy and deserving full acceptance, that **Christ Jesus** came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But **I received** mercy for this reason, that in me, as foremost, Jesus Christ might **display** his perfect patience as an **example** to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.*

- **Our lives put the gospel on display** - Life was radically different for Paul after the Lion of Judah pummeled him on the road to Damascus. He now knew that he was to bear witness to Christ to both Jews (his people) and Gentiles (everyone else). He did this by word and demonstration, by persuasion and display. When he recounted his story to King Agrippa, the king recognized what he was doing, "**In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?**" (Acts 26:28) Paul was not **ashamed** of the gospel nor did he view it as **an argument to be won or a debate to be had**. He viewed his very life and story as a vehicle or instrument to be an **example** of the power of Christ in the gospel. Often we either say *nothing* to people about Christ or we view it as an argument to win. People want to know if we believe what we are saying, and they will deem our belief viable if it actually effects our lives. We are not perfect but hopeful, we sin but admit it, and we recognize we are not living for this world because we have been offered something better. The problem is that if we DO NOT BELIEVE this, we cannot share it.
- **What this means for our church** -

Our greatest evangelistic strategy is matching a loving church with a consistent witness - Each of these is essential. There is no ultimate commitment to Christ without a commitment to His bride, and a commitment here will mean a love and pursuit of those who are ignorant in their sin.

Our most effective tool is a display and testimony of God's faithfulness in all of life - In whatever circumstance we are placed, we have an opportunity to display God's goodness and grace in Christ. I watched a little boy with spina bifida that will never walk on his own, who has had more surgeries than I can count, who will always have physical restraints impact more people than I ever will, even though I am able bodied, have a voice to speak and a platform to do it from. My nephew Blake and his family who loves him have been able to share the story of God's goodness at hospitals, with local media, in a viral video, and to all those they come in contact with. We are called to display God's goodness to those who will believe.

Our Sacred Trust is Designed to Glorify God (17)

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

- **Our life of worship originates in the reality of the gospel** - This was typical of Paul's writing as he recounted his testimony, where he would shout forth in a spontaneous doxology, a praise to God for His goodness. He recognized that God was King over all things for all time, was invisible yet active, the one and only God with all others false and pale comparisons, and the only One deserving honor and glory both now and into eternity. When Paul remembered who he was in Christ, the only reasonable response was to our testimony of God's grace in our life.
- **What this means for our church** -

The gospel fuels our worship - Worship is an outflow of what God does and is doing in our life, changing us day by day to be more like Christ and to recognize God's sovereignty and goodness in all of life. When we worship corporately, it is an external, corporate expression of the work of God collectively in our lives, recognizing God and Christ's Kingship and Lordship. Better sound quality and sharper audio/video are great servants to help us, but are terrible masters. Worship is fueled by the reality of gospel playing out in our lives, NOT something external going on around us.

Worship fuels our witness - Worship comes out of informed minds and inflamed hearts. It is a desire to see God glorified and Christ magnified that motivates us to live for Him and make Him known. That is why what we do here on a Sunday and together throughout the week is so vital. We are fed by the Word, together, and remember that we are not alone in this venture. This moves our emotional response from one of fleeting affection to a long burning passion for God and His glory.

Our Sacred Trust is Entrusted to Others (18-20)

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made a shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymanaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

- **Our life is to be invested in others** - The sacred trust was not to be guarded and left but was to be perpetuated through others. Paul entrusted the gospel to Timothy, a younger man who would take up the mantle of care and responsibility. He would have to be qualified, faithful, and pure. The church is Christ's, and He works through faithful servants who will guard and pass down the baton to succeeding generations.
- **What this means for our church** - We are constantly looking training, recognizing, and equipping more workers for the harvest. Christ is the one who will build His church, but He does this through faithful servants. Timothy did not come out of nowhere, but was trained well by his family, affirmed by the church, and trained by Paul. Each generation of the church has a responsibility in this type of perpetuation.

This all works out in how we:

Shepherd

"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you..." (1 Pet. 5:2)

"Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart." (1 Pet. 1:22)

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ...so then as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, but especially to those who of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:2, 10)

Where we have been - Our goal was to structure the church to care for herself, relationally connecting with each other so that needs could be known and met. Shepherding groups are designed to create a venue where we can love each other, know each other, and live out family realities. They are not end alls, but platforms for relationships, centered around God's Word, prayer, and care. This is also a place for gifts to be exercised, leaders to demonstrate faithfulness, and future elders confirmed. We have seen one group turn into a dozen, with dozens more faithful men leading these. Practical needs are taken care of without fanfare, counseling and spiritual care is first tasted here, and friendships have been forged.

Where we are going - We are tapped out in our current amount of leaders, especially since people keep moving to Idaho (only kidding). We are praying that God would reveal new leaders who are faithful and desire to care for people in this body. We also recognize that we must do a better job of caring for those who are NOT IN A SHEPHERDING GROUP, and are working on structuring this, particularly for that precious group that are shut in, widowed, or are no longer mobile. We also want to move forward in our care for people on Sunday mornings, not only participating in programs here but showing greater **hospitality** to strangers who visit. We want to demonstrate love in how we communicate verbally and visually, and make sure that when people come here they hear and experience the love of Christ in all areas.

Equip

*"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers, to **equip the saints for the work of ministry**, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Eph. 4:11-13)*

Where we have been - Biblical education, training the mind and heart is the essence of training our children and discipleship. A follower of Christ is by definition a learner, and we have been given the mind of Christ. Ministry, imparting the Word of God to others, is NOT relegated to pastors and elders, but is for the whole of the church. Those in leadership are to train and equip the church to do the work of ministry, both in teaching and caring, in evangelism, discipleship and service. We have done this in one on one relationships, in shepherding groups, and on staff, seeing consistent fruit of people who have learned her and are active in ministry.

Where we are going - We can do better and be more effective. We have realized in light of sending off a group to revitalize another church and seeing God move people on, that we must invest in and commit to more formal means of training and equipping. God has brought **David Wreesman** back to us from Vietnam to help us formalize what we have done in informal ways. This year we hope to launch formal equipping classes that will give a Biblical grounding for all but especially for future leaders, teachers, and counselors. We are also looking for **mentors**, especially couples, who are willing to meet with younger people and help them walk life in wisdom.

Send

"And He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'" (Luke 10:2)

"Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:19-20)

"...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Tim. 2:2)

Where we have been - God answered our prayer for where and how we were going to send out workers for the harvest, and this past year we saw the thriving revitalization of Grace church in Rancho Cucamonga. God set apart Eric and Ashley Durso, Mike and Taylor Sciarra from Grace Orange, and five other families from this church to move to Rancho and reignite the church there. This came as a result of training and prayer, and came at a cost to our church. There is a palpable void left, which means we have intentionally weakened ourselves with the hope that God will strengthen. And He has (because He always will).

We have seen God bring in **Dustin Marvin** as our Jr. High Director and **Pete LeDuc** as our High School Director to replace Eric, even though we are still supporting some of Eric's salary. In that our hope is to both shepherd and train our young people well but also train these young men for ministry here and possible other places.

We have seen God bless us **financially**, that in this last 12-18 months we have been able to take on new salaries, support Rancho, and continue to give to local ministries more than we have in almost any other year on record. The challenge has been laid out and God's people have responded.

Where we are going - All of this is a remarkable story, but it is one that is unfinished. We've said before that we will always walk on the razor's edge of faith, trusting that God will bring people and finances through His people. We have seen a dip in attendance this last year, even as giving has gone up. We have seen less people on Sunday mornings even as we've had more people in Shepherding groups. We have many who claim this as their home church who rarely attend. The answer to all of these is not to abandon what we are doing, but to continue to pray, love, and work to evaluate all things. If everyone who claimed to be a part of Grace would come here consistently, we'd have to open a third service. If everyone consistently comes would invite ONE FAMILY or person to come with them, we'd double our attendance. But these are NOT our goals. We desire to be faithful to what God has called us to in the church, and the proof of that faithfulness will be the people of God acting like the people of God, in loving, worshipful, passionate ways.

Do we need more people to give? Yep. We have projects to get done like air conditioning on this building and more people to train. Do we need more participation? Yep. I am approached often by young people who are looking for mentoring and the list of people is not long enough. Do we need you? Yep. God will build His church, but He does it through His people.

So pray with us for this year. As in any family, there will be the unexpected, the hard, the medical challenges, and the disappointing. But we walk into the future with hope. Pray that God will give us what we need, not what we want, and that we would want what is most needed. Pray that God would stir in you to display your faith to one friend or neighbor. Pray that you would commit to being here consistently, to sacrifice yourself in service, and to walk in joy. Pray that God would be glorified in us and that He would find us faithful. I am excited for the future, not so much about **what's next, but about who's next.**