

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.

I am the foremost, the chief, of sinners, Paul says. Which is an interesting choice of words, if you stop to think about them for a minute, because Paul uses the present tense, “I am”. He doesn’t say, “I was the chief of sinners,” or even “I used to be chief of sinners.” He says, “I am the chief of sinners.”

When you consider Paul’s life before his experience on the road to Damascus, it was a living witness to his words, “formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and an insolent opponent” to the Christian faith.

When Stephen was stoned to death, there was Paul, giving his approval, people laying their garments at his feet. This was the man who went out and arrested Christians and threw them in jail. He breathed murderous threats against Christians and against the Lord Jesus Himself. Make no mistake about it, his aim was to destroy the church, Christians, and Christ Himself. He was the foremost of sinners.

But all that changed on the road to Damascus. As he was journeying there in order to persecute even more Christians, a light shone on him, he was knocked to the ground, something like scales covered his eyes and he was blinded. The Lord Jesus sent him to a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. And Ananias laid his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Ac 9:17). Immediately, the scales fell from Paul’s eyes and he rose and was

baptized, he was filled with the Holy Spirit, his sins were washed away, and he was forgiven. And he became the apostle to the Gentiles.

So, it would make sense if Paul would say, "I was the chief of sinners," but he doesn't. He says, "I am the chief of sinners" even though he's been baptized, his sins were washed away and he has been forgiven. That's what he says about himself. Would you say that about yourself? You have been baptized, you have been filled with the Holy Spirit, your sins were washed away, you were forgiven. All past tense. So, would you say that you are a sinner? Sure ya would. You did it again this morning. You stood up and confessed that you have sinned in your thoughts, words, and deeds, and that you cannot free yourself from your sinful condition. You confessed that you are a sinner. You did that because even you are a Christian, you have been forgiven, you are still a sinner. As long as you live on this side of heaven, living in the flesh, you are a saint and a sinner, at the same time.

Paul talks all about it in the book of Romans,

For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing (Ro 7:18b-19).

You know that all too well. Paul's life was a living witness to the fact that he was a sinner, and Paul has nothing on you. You have been baptized and live in Christ, but you are still a sinner. And you know you could challenge Paul for the title of world's foremost sinner. You know that because your sin is ever before you.

You know your sin all too well. There you are visiting that porn sight in the darkness of your basement; having a drink after you vowed never to drink again; pulling those one-arm bandits at the casino, gambling away

another paycheck. You keep doing it over and over and over, again and again. You have been baptized, you have been forgiven, but that sin clings so tightly to you and you fight and fight and fight but still you keep doing the very things you do not want to do, until you get to the point that you wonder: is there forgiveness for someone like me?

Others, of course, would never suffer such pains of conscience. Sure, you sin, but it's no big deal, because your sins are socially acceptable. It's not lying and cheating and stealing, no, you are looking out for # 1. It's not adultery, because you are in love. It's not fornication, but that someone special you are carrying on that secret affair with understands you. It's not coveting and greed, because you only go around once. OK, you're a sinner, but not the foremost of sinners. Because your sins are socially acceptable, you've convinced yourself that they aren't that bad, certainly not as bad as your neighbor's. This just means that you suffer from pride and arrogance, and the truth of the Bible is that your sins are just as worthy of condemnation as Paul's, or anyone else's sins are.

But Paul says, "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."

Jesus came into the world born of Mary, wrapped in swaddling cloths, and laid in a manger. He came into the world to save sinners – to save you. Here's how He did it. In His flesh, He perfectly obeyed all of God's commandments – for you. He did for you what you could not perfectly do for yourself. And because you were not perfectly obedient to God's commandments, He took all of your sins of thought, word, and deed upon Himself, and carried them to Calvary's cross.

And all sins means all sins. Nothing is left out. The ones you don't think all that important, He carried to Calvary. The ones you struggle with again and again, day after day, He carried those to Calvary, as well. Nailed to that wooden tree, He paid the price for all your sins. His blood and His death upon that cross have earned for you free and full forgiveness for all your sins. And it also saves you from death and hell. All that is true for you, **BECAUSE CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS.**

And the Good News of the Gospel gets even better for you, Dear Child of God. Jesus came to save sinners, and because He did, you are forgiven all of your sins. And, He continues to come to you. That's what He's doing here this morning, coming to you in the Word, water, and bread and wine, to bring you forgiveness, and life, and salvation. Right here, right now, Christ Jesus forgives you.

Saints of God, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven! You are free from the shame of guilt and fear of death. Because you are forgiven, you will dwell in the house of the Lord ever.

And that also means that as you live your earthly days, your life, like Paul's, is a living witness not to sin and lawlessness, but to the forgiveness, the joy, and the victory that is ours in Christ Jesus. Today, our nation remembers. 15 years ago, terrorism came to our shores and the twin towers and the Pentagon were attacked. And, we remember the horror, the anxiety, the grief, the sadness. Today, as well, the family of Concordia {Zion} celebrates the beginning of Sunday School.

In all of this, and in all our days of earthly life, we can point people to Jesus. Through the means of His Word, and water, and bread and wine, Jesus does His work in you, so that He can do His work of rounding up the

lost and straying sheep through you -- as you welcome and greet those who worship with you -- pray for those who are sick, mourning, or living troubled lives -- encourage the weak and fearful with the strength we have in Jesus – comfort those who mourn and grieve with the comfort we ourselves have in Jesus. Amen.