THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF EVERY CHRISTIAN

1. Chapter 1: A humble confession of sin
2. Chapter 2: A simple trust in the Savior of sinners
3. Chapter 3: An example to others of God's amazing grace

The story of another person's life is called a biography, but when the person writes it himself, it becomes his autobiography. Writing your own life story seems to be the thing to do these days. It seems like just about everyone is writing one these days – from ex-Presidents and athletes to movie stars. When you write your own life story it is usually slanted in your favor. Autobiographies are opportunities for people to toot their own horns.

Suppose you and I were suddenly called upon to write an account of our lives, knowing we only had a short time to live. What would we include in it? What would seem important? Would we toot our own horn? What would be worth mentioning at such a time? Would we leave some things out because we would not want anyone else to know?

This morning God's Word presents us with a very unique autobiography, not just because the Holy Spirit inspired the man who wrote it, but what we have here is not just one man's life story, it is THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF EVERY CHRISTIAN. Chapter 1: A humble confession of sin; Chapter 2: A simple trust in the Savior of sinners; Chapter 3: An example to others of God's amazing grace.

I am going to ask some questions right now that might seem strange to you, but these are questions that must be answered by everyone of us. Here they are! Who do you think is the worst person in church this morning? Who here today has done more things wrong than anyone else in this congregation? Who in our midst at this moment least deserves to be called a child of God? I must say that person is me! And I pray each of you would also want to say: That person is me!

In our text St. Paul is willing to make that statement about himself. He says: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst.

Paul remembered well how it was with him - how he had been a violent blasphemer of God, who persecuted of Christians. He had done everything in his power to wipe the name of Jesus off the face of the earth. Nothing had made him happier than seeing Christ's followers suffer. Even though many years had passed, even though God had forgiven him and received him as his child, even though he had worked harder than anybody else for the cause of Christianity, Paul still does not hesitate to call himself chief of sinners. Even though he had been a Christian for a long time, Paul did not think of himself better than anyone else. He did not feel that after all he had done for Christ, he now deserved some special consideration. Paul recognized his own sins. He wrote to the Romans: I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful flesh - for what I do is not the good I want to do: no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing. What a wretched man I am!

Humanly speaking, this was not an easy confession for Paul to make. He could have tried to excuse his sin, pointing out that many others were just as bad, if not worse than he was. He could have whitewashed his sins by figuring he had more than made up for them by the way he was living now. He did not do that. I am the worst of sinners. That is the humble confession made by the Christian Paul in Chapter 1 of his autobiography.
Can that first chapter in our autobiography be any different than Paul's was? The Bible says: **If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.** Yet how often doesn't the devil pull the wool over our eyes when it comes to this truth? How hard it is for us to say it about ourselves - how much harder yet it is for us to believe it about ourselves: **I am the worst of sinners.**

It is easy for us to down-play the seriousness of breaking God's Commandments. It is easy for us to whitewash ourselves with this flimsy comfort that we are not as wicked as all those other people are. Fellow sinners, let's never forget that our life will not be judged by the standards we come up with, but by the standards of a holy and righteous God who says: **The soul that sins shall die!**

It is in such a time like this that you and I must join Paul and humbly confess: **I am the worst of sinners. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For what I do is not the good I want to do. No, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing.** We have sinned against God in countless ways. We worry and complain. We lie. We disobey those whom you place over me. We are lazy about reading the Bible. Our language needs cleaning up. We talk about people who are not present to defend themselves. I am the worst of sinners!

My friends, only when we begin with that confession can our autobiography have a happy ending. Only when you and I begin with this confession, **Chief of sinners though I be-** only then, can we also add these words: **Jesus shed his blood for me.**

You see, there is a second chapter in the autobiography of every Christian. It's the most moving chapter in the book. It reads: **Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance; Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.** That is the message of God's amazing grace. That is the good news of the Gospel. Christ Jesus, God's only Son from all eternity, came into the world. He lived a perfect life all the while he was here. Before he left, this Christ Jesus let himself be nailed to a cross where he suffered and died a terrible death. Why? Three words say it all: **To save sinners.** With Paul, we too can say: **I am the worst of sinners, but Christ Jesus came into the world and saved me!** That means we have been forgiven of all of our sins! **Forgiven!** That is sweetest word in our English language! Say it to yourself right now: **I am the worst of sinners, but Christ Jesus came into the world and saved me!** That means ours is not some meaningless existence where we plod along day after day with no purpose for our present and no hope for our future. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Because of him we are not going to hell when we die. We are going to heaven and we are going to live there forever with Jesus.

But there are still those times when our consciences try to drag some skeleton in our closet and hold them over our heads. All kinds of things which have been wrong in our lives; secret thoughts we would be too ashamed to tell anyone about, times we were weak when we should have been strong, times we said yes when we should have said no. We experience that same agony of guilt which drove Paul to cry out: **What a wretched man I am.**

At just those moments we turn to this trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.** Let Satan, hell, and our own deceitful conscience shout endless accusations at us. Let them tell us that our sins are too great or too many to be forgiven. It matters not. We have Jesus who came to save us and has washed all our sins away.
There is one more chapter in the autobiography of every Christian. It is the chapter we want the lost and dying world around us to read. Paul gives us the chapter with these words:

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Paul is telling us that he is an example of what God’s amazing grace is all about. Jesus rescued this chief of sinners from the fires of hell. Then Jesus took his worst enemy and changed him into his most loyal friend, a dedicated missionary for Christ. Paul is telling us that, when it came to sinners, he was at the top of the list and yet look at what Jesus did for him! And if Jesus did it for Paul, he will most certainly do the very same thing for anyone!

My friends, you and I are living examples of what God’s amazing grace is all about. Jesus has rescued each of us from the fires of hell. Jesus has taken us, his worst enemies, and transformed us into his best friends. By the power of the Holy Spirit we can now live lives for Christ. For that, we thank and praise God as Paul does.

My friends, look at yourselves as living examples of what God’s amazing grace is all about. Our world needs examples of God's amazing grace like you and me! We all know and run into people who are sinners, who are stumbling aimlessly through life on the road to hell, who are carrying the guilt of an unforgiven sin. As one of those examples of God's grace, we have something precious to share with such a person. We can say to them: I am a terrible sinner too, but I was shown mercy. Jesus died for me on a cross and he has forgiven me. I am still a sinner, but I live with his forgiveness every day of my life. No matter what you may have done, that forgiveness belongs to you too. Just trust in him as your Savior!

My friends, be such an example of God’s grace to others. To that husband and wife whose marriage is floundering, to that frustrated parent who feels inadequate, to that teenager who is all messed up and depressed, to that neighbor who is mourning a loved-one’s death, to that friend who is struggling with some problem and does not know where to turn - to such a person we can say: I know how difficult life can be sometimes, but I also know that Jesus cares and Jesus can help. He has carried me through so many tough times. He will do the same thing for you. Put your life in his hands. My friends, be such an example of God's grace to others.

I do not imagine that any of those big publishing house will be asking any of us to ever write an autobiography. But someday our obituary will be written. Maybe it will contain many fine things about us. Maybe it will contain many fine things about us. Maybe the pastor could pay us a glowing tribute at our funeral. But let’s make it our concern here and now that the story of our life may be summarized in these words:

Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed his blood for me;  
Died that I might live on high, lived that I might never die.  
As the branch is to the vine, I am his, and he is mine. Amen.

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